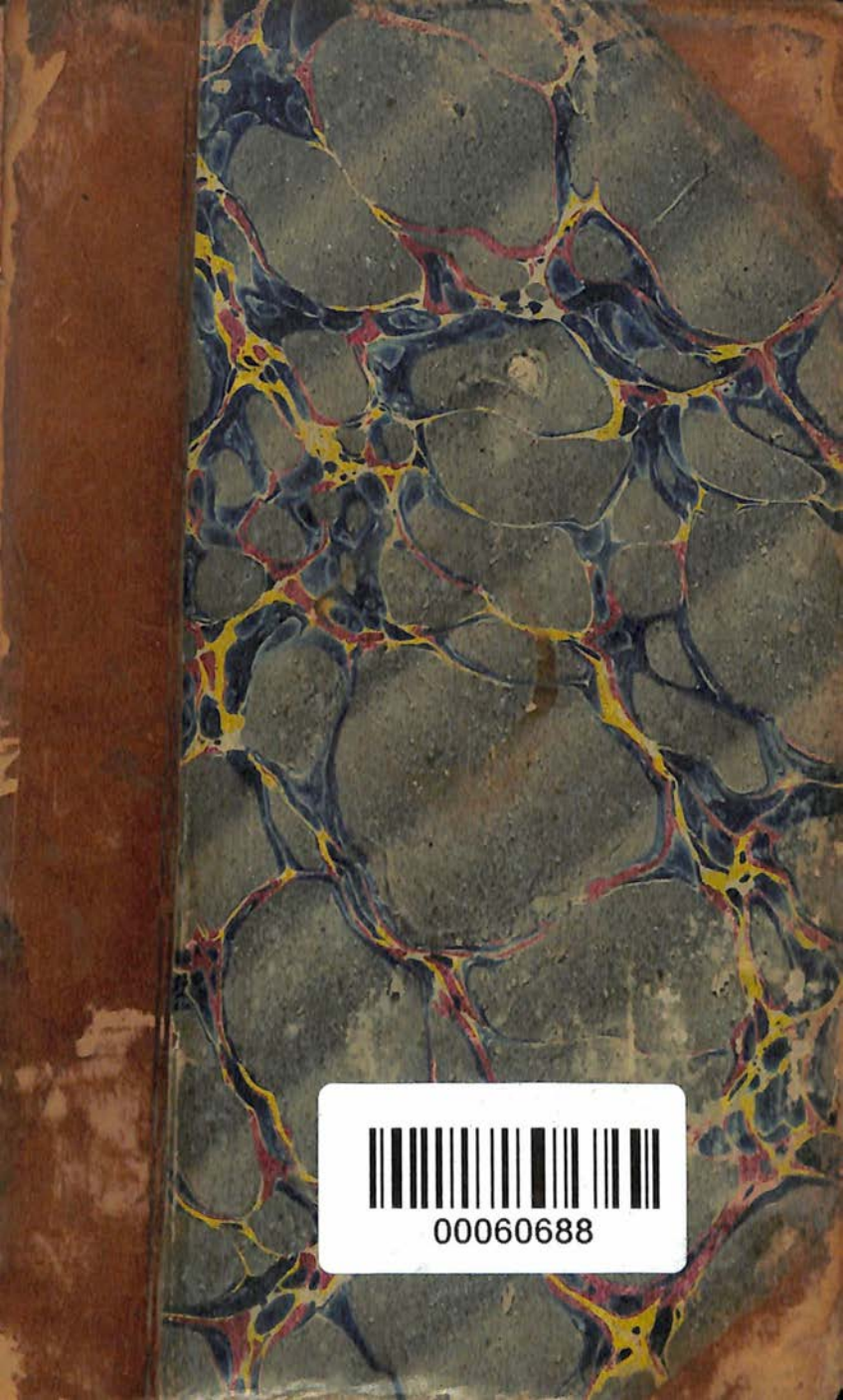
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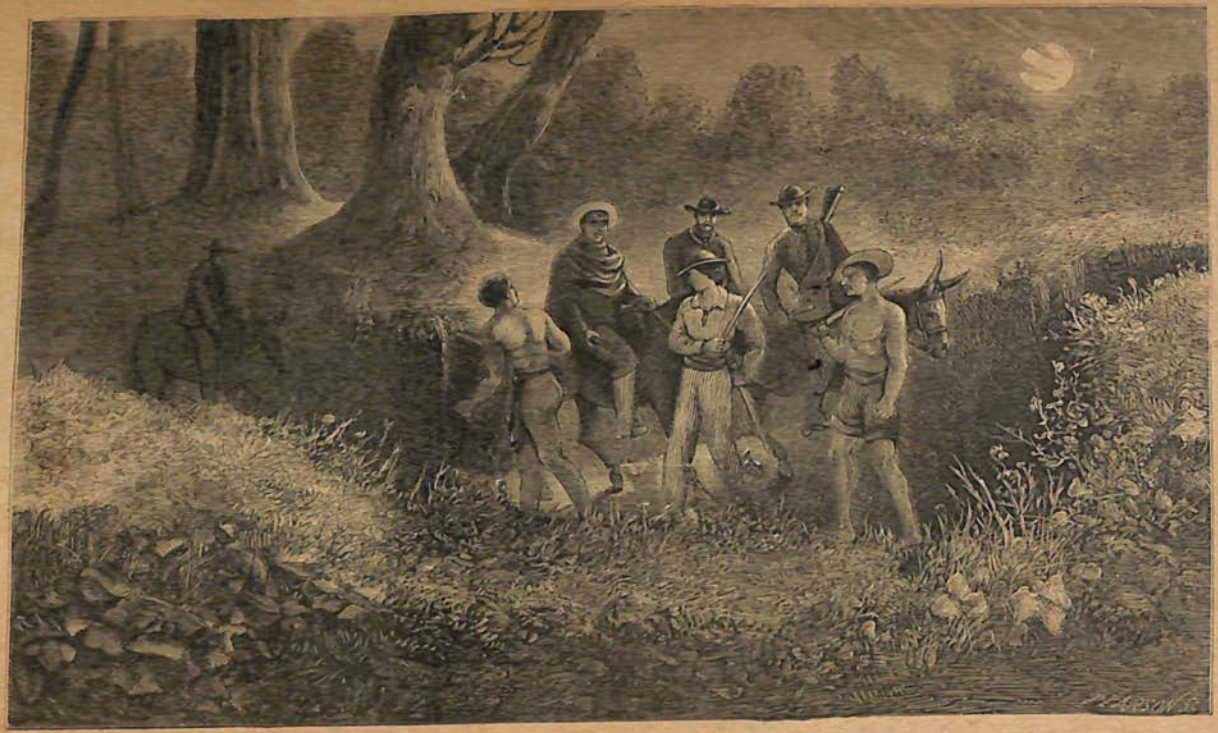

VOL. II. MEETING OF TRAVELLERS IN NICARAGUA.

A RIDE ACROSS A CONTINENT:

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF WANDERINGS THROUGH NICARAGUA AND COSTA RICA.

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BY

FREDERICK BOYLE, F.R.G.S.,
AUTHOR OF "ADVENTURES AMONG THE DYAKS OF BORNEO."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME II.

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A RIDE ACROSS A CONTINENT.

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WHILE waiting the complete recovery of Mr. Jebb, I rode about the neighbourhood of Granada, sometimes with a friend, but more frequently by myself. How many times in our native land, or on those shores which Britons have peaceably but firmly annexed, has the harmless traveller been dragged out sternly by his host to the top of a distant hill, whence is obtained an advantageous view of

the workhouse clock, or the Atlantic ocean, or six adjoining counties of no interest to any human being except their inhabitants! Many a time have I put myself in this condition without a word of remonstrance—which would indeed be thought "shocking"—but never without that inward chuckling which claims precedence before the open scoffer. One finds some consolation indeed in a careful consideration of the operator. How grandly stupid is his action in pointing out the miserable mountain or the shrinking tree! Pleasant it is to hear the chaotic moan of one's fellow-victims—"Lovely! 'Pon my soul! Beautifully lovely!"—as they strain their eyes in searching for some notable object which they cannot see—and wouldn't care twopence about if they could.

One's feeling is rather different when one wanders at will, whether between English hedgerows or beneath the pale bananas. Nature is not, as a rule, prepared for the lecturer and his long stick, nor are the amiable gentlemen who engage in such service usually those whom we should prefer for the duty. In my mind dwell bits of scenery, hunted and found by my own

exertions, bits of a few yards, a few inches, which are to me worth all the mountains that ever were rhymed. Indians are necessarily picturesque, and as they care nothing for the beauty of their homes, they are not apt to bore a harmless traveller about the "view"—view! word to make one shudder! In the tropics Nature loves best her own dark children, and adorns their careless homes with a glory and a grace she will not spare for the hard lines of civilized building. The Indian huts are always built in some pretty spot, and bowered over with twisted creepers and feathery leaves. But then they are so idle! Ay, they are, and alas for the spirit of our age! For if all work indeed, what will become of beauty?

After some few days my friend announced his intention of taking the saddle in a day or two. Accordingly I rode to Masaya, a large Indian town about four leagues from Granada, intending to wait for him. The road thither is good—for the country—being moderately hard in the dry season, and not more than a foot deep during the rains; its breadth is precisely that of a bullock-cart. I

started on my little chesnut mule about three o'clock in the day, and at five reached the town. In some parts of the road, ground and shrubs and trees were hidden under a leafy sea of creepers, while flowers, of every varied colour, hung in garlands from the boughs. The glory of Nicaragua is a large blue convolvulus, which spreads out its spotless flowers over every bit of waste ground, and makes a garden of the poorest spot. On either side the road were hedges of pinuela, or wild pineapple, of which many species are known in England. It was at that time in fruit, but the bunches of separate berries were as little like our cultivated pine as a cluster of filberts would be. The fields thus guarded were principally of maize, which will here give three* crops in the year; but the harvest was over, and the heaped straw was black with birds. I was surprised to see many zopilote or turkey buzzards hopping about the piles; is it possible they may occasionally take to a vegetable diet for change? Certainly the "John Crow," as he is called in the West Indies, is the ugliest and clumsiest of flying

* In some parts of Nicaragua four crops may be raised, but it is rarely done. The yield is generally about five hundredfold, and it is usually harvested in safety.

creatures. That long, thin neck, scraggy and featherless, that heavy bill and small head, rising from a dingy black body of disproportionate size, may be perfectly fitted for his very nasty mode of life, but are more ugly than most other things. But there is much fun in the John Crow. Any one who has amused himself with "flushing" one of these ungainly fowls—they are as tame as ducks—will recollect with a laugh the agonized hops he took to get way upon his ponderous body. We never missed an opportunity to set them up, and I recommend the sport to every Central American traveller. It is the only public amusement.

The fields of tobacco were numerous and well kept, but these lay more particularly near Masaya. Tobacco is a staple product of Nicaragua, and the principal seat of culture is in this neighbourhood. There is practically no limit to its extension, yet cigars are now much imported from San Salvador. Even ten years ago, the amount raised was double the present quantity; and the Government Report of 1847 gave fifteen millions as the number of plants in the district of Masaya alone. Two harvests are borne

in the year; the first in February, the second in August; and in spite of the tax of five dollars upon every two acres of land—nearly half a cent upon each plant—an enormous profit may be realized. Though the bulk of this cultivation is in the Departemento Oriental, the growth of Segovia is more valued, and the very best cigars come from the island of Ometepec; but, owing to ignorance in the mode of preparation, even these are very indifferent smoking. They are excessively strong and bitter. To any one who has smoked a San Salvador cigar, I can give some idea of their quality. Those gigantic bolsters are to the Ometepec production as real Londres to halfpenny pickwicks.

Masaya is said to have eighteen thousand inhabitants; and this estimate is near enough to satisfy every one in the country. Nine-tenths are Indians of pure blood, and still live, if not in the identical huts of their forefathers, at least in buildings precisely similar. The walls consist of an open framework of bamboos, which allows the air to pass freely, while a heavy roof of palm thatch excludes the sun. In all cases the huts stand in a swept yard, planted with coyol

palms and flowering shrubs. Each family thus occupies a great deal of ground, for behind the yard extends a grove of orange trees or jicaras: some huts of a single room will monopolise an acre of land. In this manner the statements of the conquerors—that the towns were three and four leagues square—may be in some measure credible, for the density of the Indian population was undoubtedly enormous. M. Scherzer, indeed, attributes the poverty of Nicaraguan forest timber to the fact that the whole land was cultivated like a garden, and the trees have not yet had time to reach their natural size. However this may be, all accounts agree that this country, which now barely contains two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, was once swarming with Indians; and, in fact, the old historians give one town alone, Managua, a population of sixty thousand, nor do they seem to note this as the largest settlement. It is a fact which we ourselves demonstrated, that in no part of the country—savannah, shore, or forest—can any hole be dug without encountering fragments of ancient pottery. In Ometepec this is especially noticeable.

The streets of Masaya are bordered on either side with thick hedges of wild pine-apple, carefully trimmed, and the huts almost always stand back some little distance, half hidden by the dense foliage round. Looking down one of these roads, the vista is charming. Here and there among the prickly leaves springs a mighty cactus, whose green columns tower up thirty feet into the air. The grey roofs peep out through a mass of scarlet flowers, and the walls are hidden by hedges of wild pine-apple. Everywhere the houses are raised several feet above the roadway, and flowers and fruit trees and feathery palms almost hide them from sight.

The church is a large and rather handsome building, of much better architecture than the hideous structures of Granada. It is situated in the midst of a fine plaza, filled, at the time of my first visit, with a busy multitude of market-women. I looked in vain for the pretty faces which are commonly attributed to the Masaya Indians. Even had the features been good, the disproportionate size of the head, the coarse harsh hair, and the dwarfish stature, must have destroyed all claim to beauty. The men were

somewhat better looking, and, though low in stature, they seemed strong and active; but all bore that stealthy look which long centuries of oppression have stamped into their eyes. The costumes are simple, and, with better figures, would be elegant. The men wear short trousers half way to the knee, and the women twist a long strip of blue-checked cotton round their waists. When out of doors they cover the breasts with a square handkerchief, which is held in its place by passing the upper corners under the straps of the load they carry on their shoulders. How this handkerchief may be fastened when the load is not there, I cannot tell, because I never saw such a case. The Indian girls are either wonderfully industrious, or else they put on the "camice" when going out a walk.

On the following day I rode down to the playa, or lake side. This singular piece of water lies at a depth of three hundred feet* beneath the level of the town, and a long cutting in the solid rock forms the road by which every drop of water has to be carried. No wonder the

* Measurements vary from twelve hundred to three hundred (!).

Masaya women have hideous faces and stunted figures. Hundreds of little girls, eight and nine years of age, whose slender bodies would be naturally upright as young pines, may be seen every morning and night carrying four or five gourds of water up this fearful incline. The death-rate among children is said to be excessive; and the wonder to a stranger is, how any one of these little slaves can possibly escape. I have read several accounts of that most extraordinary piece of Indian engineering, the lake-cutting at Masaya, but not one that did justice to its marvels. How a people unacquainted with metal could possibly have carried through such an immense excavation, is beyond all conception. I cannot believe that, in its present state at least, it is not the work of the Spaniards, though no doubt a road of some sort did exist at the conquest; as in fact we are told by the earliest historians, who express their wonder and admiration. Or if it be not so, I can only change the epoch, and claim it as the work of Quichés, or some other race anterior to the modern Indians. It is impossible that such colossal labour should have been dreamed of by the comparatively savage

race whose descendants still occupy the country.*

Imagine a cutting in the solid rock, a mile long, and gradually descending to a depth of at least three hundred feet! This is claimed as the work of a people which was not acquainted with blasting or with iron tools. Nature had evidently little hand in the matter, though a cleft in the rock may perhaps have helped the excavators. The mouth of this tunnel is about half a mile from the town, and every drop of water used must be brought on mules or the backs of human beings. Mules the poorer people have not, and the backs of the men are otherwise employed, so this fearful toil falls wholly upon their wives and children. A grown woman will

* I do not see why the direct testimony of Herrera should be doubted. He says (Decade III. lib. vi. chap. 2):—"In the province of Masaya is a small round lake, which lies at a depth of one thousand fathoms from the level of the ground. Down this precipice the Indians go daily to fetch water, in pitchers holding about six gallons. The ascent and descent is like a wall; for as it is a solid rock, they have made holes in it to put in their fingers and toes, and so they go up and down, a thing not to be believed except by those who have seen it." Acosta, referring casually to this lake, observes that the density of the population in Nicaragua compelled such labours as these—labour of going up and down the rock, I presume. It is satisfactory to think that the Spanish conquest has benefited somebody.

carry five or six large gourds, suspended in a net from her forehead or shoulders; and smaller loads are fitted to the waning strength of the grey-haired granddam and the slender shoulders of the child. Twice daily they toil up and down an incline so steep that few Europeans could climb it without resting every few steps; and though they probably see no hardship in this lot, it is pitiful to watch their panting struggles. Some years ago a company commenced boring an artesian well in the midst of the town, but whether from want of funds, or from despair, the work was abandoned, and its ruins stand desolate.

The scene at the "Plaza" in early morning is as lively as at Granada, but the view is more charming. Except at the foot of the road, tall cliffs rise steeply round the lake, and the sun, scarcely risen, tips their highest crest of foliage with a horizontal ray. The water lies in deep shadow, and night mists still curl around the rocks. Far above the head is a sheen of gilded leaves, while a dusky cloud still wraps the path. The crowd is dense; women are beating clothes, grooms are washing their horses, young girls

are laughing over their water jars, and children are screaming and shouting. The lake is peopled as thickly as the land. Long tangles of snaky black hair stream behind the swimmers, and sleek heads dot the water far out. Ceremony, or propriety, as we deem it, there is none; but the Indian women do not seem so coolly cynical as the mestizos.

Our "meson," or hotel, was not a luxurious habitation, but it did very well—a single room and a single bed were alone provided for any number of guests, but the one was large and high, and the other singularly soft lying. Our host was a good-looking fellow, unusually fair in skin; but he was suffering severely from aggravated symptoms of early paternity. He was handsomely and rather stylishly dressed in a brown Guatemalan jacket woven with an edging of broad check, an embroidered shirt, and a scarlet sash. His trousers matched the jacket, and his tie the sash. Brimming he was with complaints about the condition of his country, the idleness of his people, and the hopelessness of things generally; but I did not notice that he did much himself except play with his pretty child.

Helpless railing is so pleasant to the spirit tired of lying and lies; and, besides, it may possibly do good somewhere.

If there were only a little life in Masaya, a little amusement, a little pleasure, a little work, or worship, or murder, or pestilence—if there were but something to remind one that these people are after all one's fellow-creatures, who will laugh when they are tickled, and cry when they are hurt, just as any of us mighty ones! If there were only some young *men*, some young fools, who cared nothing about selling gold mines to English capitalists, nor conspired against the wretched government of this most wretched country, but set themselves to do the work or play that came to hand, what a change might they bring about! But there are no young men. The class which should give them has been shot down, and exiled, and driven into poverty, and forced into the linendrapery business. Hope and enthusiasm have died out, and the life of the people has died out too. As I sit in a shadow of pink flowers, which form a triumphal pyramid outside the hotel, I watch the passers-by for one hour. This is the list. Item,

an old Indian with a tremendous load of wood on his head, and the unfailing machete in his hand. Item, a young Indian driving two mules—the mules are very good-looking, but the boy is ugly to the verge of impossibility. Item, two little girls carrying water-gourds in a net slung over the top of their heads. Interval of twenty-three minutes. Item, a very hideous old woman carrying a straw hat, which blows away—pursuit of the hat and vast excitement. Item, a young but ugly female selling various wares set upon a tray. Item, a frightful being of the feminine gender, born without fingers or toes, who comes to beg a "real," with a curse upon us for "Americanos." This is during the busiest part of the day.

One of the plagues of Nicaragua, for which the people are *not* responsible, is the "pica-pica." The outward and visible sign of this singular complaint is a number of very small white or red spots upon the skin, and its inward effect is an itching sufficient to drive one mad. In Chontales and near Granada the people attribute it to the presence of cattle; but here and in other districts it is ascribed to the furry bean of a

liana growing very commonly in the woods and hedges. A high wind will blow off the soft but prickly down, and carry it lightly along. To the first unfortunate who should happen to meet the gust, the "pica-pica" attaches itself firmly, penetrating his clothes and working into the skin. Whichever be the right theory, and I believe both are correct, it is certain that after a brisk wind the whole country-side will scratch itself madly for a week. No doors or shutters will keep out the "pica-pica," and woe to the wretched soul who should venture to lie down on a bed that has been open for an hour. The only way we found to keep it from the skin was to wear clothes of flannel. Mosquitoes there are none at Masaya.

On the 8th January I returned to Granada, noticing as I rode along that smoke seemed to be ascending from the volcano of Mombacho, now long extinct, which towers above the city. On arrival I told M. Mestayer of this fact, and learnt in return that two shocks of earthquake had been felt during my absence, but so slight as not to disturb the inhabitants in any way. No one would believe my story about smoke,

asserting that the volcano had been inactive since the conquest.

Two days later, on the evening of January 10, I was sitting alone in my room, absorbed in that most tender of all Bernard's delicious novelettes, the first sketch in "Le Paravent." The silence through the town was deathlike, excepting, now and again, the hoarse call of an Indian sentry, and the faint crackle of the roof-timbers expanding themselves with the evening chill. But the air was yet sultry in my room, and I had thrown down buckets of water over the floor-tiles, to create coolness by evaporation. Both doors were fastened. My body was indeed stretched, half-dressed, in a broken arm-chair; but my soul was merry in that ideal bal de l'opera (strictly ideal) which Charles de Bernard and Théophile Gautier alone can draw. Suddenly I became aware of a loud rattle and shivering, which entered my mind so dimly that I recollect a thought;—How fast that cab is going; these old houses of the Quartier will certainly fall some night!—Still in the joyous city!—But with the next beat of my pulse I knew the truth. The rattle grew into a roar, and the

quiver into a heave and a swing. Table and lamp crashed over, and as I tore at the door hasp, the earth was tugging and struggling under my feet like a thing alive. Long since the air was one hideous scream of terror. Even the sounds of the earthquake were drowned in that frantic yell. As I stumbled along the heaving corridor to Mr. Jebb's room, the din of fear was dismal as at the Last Day. Women were shrieking and wailing to their saints; men were shouting and groaning; mules plunging loose about the courtyard; every living thing raised its voice in that chorus of terror.

I found Mr. Jebb standing by the street door of his room. As he himself said—"It isn't fair to try a sick man so. When I saw that big beam jerking above my head, I hopped over the hammock side as we used to top the vaulting horse at MacLaren's." I got a chair, and we sat in the doorway, watching the frantic doings in the street. Then we shouted for Ellis and Mr. D——, to hear their opinions on this novelty. Ellis sturdily contended it "wasn't right," just as if the performance had been got up for his pleasure, and had failed to give satisfaction.

Passing to the door of the hotel, I found our host arranging mattresses on the floor, for all his family to sleep in the very entrance. At present they were at church, whither had rushed every orthodox soul in the town. Already stories were in circulation of fallen houses, burnings, and death; the truth could not be known till morning. While I stood with M. Mestayer, conversing, the sound of a great multitude's trampling reached our ears; then suddenly a dozen violins burst into a scream of Indian music, and ten thousand voices joined in the wailing "De profundis." We went out and looked towards the Plaza. Far as eye could reach stretched a black-hooded crowd, bearing torches, and crawling past to the doleful measure of their dirge. In front were five or six priests carrying the Host, and behind them marched the Indian band. Nearer and nearer they came, dully gleaming in the red torchlight. From every house people poured out, first falling on their knees in worship of the Host. So intense was the terror that none paid attention to Mestayer and myself standing upright in the doorway. As they passed beneath, it was a

glorious sight and a glorious hearing. I think if one of the great maestros had heard that dismal wail, so loud, so shrill, so utterly unearthly, the wail of a whole people maddened with fear—if he had seen their blanched faces, their terror-swollen eyes burning red in the torchlight, he must have forsworn his art, or carried off the impulse of a masterpiece unapproachable.

About a quarter to two A.M. came another most alarming heave, which sent us into the street with amazing rapidity. The sky was open and brilliant, and the stars shining through the palm trees by the road. Blue and hazy above us, Mombacho towered up, seeming to look down on the city with a giant kindliness. The lake was moaning much more loudly than we ever heard it in the worst weather; but with that clear sky overhead, and peaceful scenery round, it was hard to believe that a savage foe was at that moment struggling to get loose upon us. After we returned to our rooms two more shocks followed, and then all was still till morning.

Between breakfast and dinner on the 11th

there were four very faint heavings, but the mist or smoke on Mombacho had become a dense cloud. In the evening the wind and lake began to rise again as on the night before, and two faint shocks came about eight o'clock. How many times does one read that such and such a city was overthrown by an earthquake, yet what idea do the words really give us of the long agony of waiting—be it weeks or days or hours, it is still an agony of waiting—the slow torture of the time until the end really came? If ever hereafter it should fall in our way to read a simple telegraphic despatch, "—— city was destroyed by an earthquake, on —— inst.," we shall be better able to feel what the horror of that line really is. It is the waiting—the waiting.

Mad. Mestayer, who was a Chilian by birth, seemed to recognize the two species of convulsion among the shocks we had felt. The first and most severe of all she called a "terremoto," or movement of the earth; all the rest were of the commoner class called "tremblor." In regard to this classification, I recommend the reader to that most charming book of Mr.

George Byam, "Wild Life in Central America." The author says that the "tremblor" is superficial, and that workmen at the bottom of a mine will first hear of such a shock on ascending to upper earth. In the case of a "terremoto," on the contrary, "the earth under, over, and on every side will be convulsed, stones will detach themselves from the roof and sides of the mine; and sauve qui peut is the order of the day." Mr. Byam believes that the tremblor is an electrical shock unconnected with volcanic action, while the terremoto is a positive movement of the earth itself. "And what do you think is the cause of the terremoto?" asks a scientific friend of Mr. Byam. "Quien sabe? who knows?" is the answer, and an excellent one it is to every question a person cannot or will not answer.

About four o'olock in the afternoon of the 11th, as I stood in the midst of a great crowd, staring at the wreaths of smoke or mist which twined and twisted round the top of Mombacho, Don Fernando Lacayo came as ambassador on the part of the municipality, to sound us about an exploration of the mountain. With many

flattering praises of the English nation and ourselves, he offered, on the part of the town, to provide us with mules, guides, and six picked soldiers in fatigue dress, to carry our necessaries, if we would undertake the task. I told him I should need an hour for preparation; but as the mules were not yet brought in, it was settled that the start should not take place before sunrise next morning. A little shiver came over us as we closed the bargain.

But the undisturbed stillness of the night calmed the people's fears, and the municipality determined to put off the exploration until their next panic. After waiting the whole forenoon, we received a note from the prefect, courteously thanking us in the name of the town, but lamenting that trustworthy guides could not be found. A French gentleman from Libertad accompanied me to the municipality, where I offered to make the exploration at my own cost, if the government would supply one guide. Such a scuffling ensued! Such a whispering and disputing! Finally, it was settled I should have a guide, two mozos, and a requisition upon Don H—— S——, the owner of a large hacienda

or farm at the foot of the mountain. Everything was to be ready at three o'clock in the afternoon, and we ordered our mules for that hour.

But at four o'clock nothing had come from the Prefecture; and not a little savagely I wrote to Don Fernando Lacayo, assuring him we were tired of these practical jokes, and gave up the affair. He wrote back that our guides and mozos had already gone on, with orders to await us at Don H—— S——'s hacienda. A few moments afterwards a soldier arrived to take us thither, and we fairly got away about half past four. The party consisted of M. Etienne, better known in Central America as Barbachella, Mr. D——, Ellis, Gulielmo, and the soldier, a saucy, good-looking young fellow, in whom I should have had some confidence.

Two hours' ride between hedges of wild pine-apple, through rocky gorges, and belts of open forest, took us to an Indian town called Dirioma, about four leagues from Granada. Dusk settled down before reaching it, and, as we wandered among the broad, white streets, we thought that the beauty and the tenderness of tropical nature could never be better seen than in this strag-

gling village. As at Masaya, every cottage stood in its own grounds, but here the road was bordered with hedges of the organo, a mighty cactus. In the dusk of night these lofty columns made a stately vista, not less imposing than marble pillars, and the black palms which drooped their leaves against the starlit sky looked like the flags of an old-world pomp. Here and there was an awful shadow of vast trees; the air was heavy with the evening incense of flowers.

We found shelter in the hut of an old woman, who "skirred" away like a partridge to put on her "camice." The appointments of the house were for a very "limited company," but the good-will was immense. Like Jephthah, the old lady had one daughter, who was passing ugly. This damsel, after covering her shoulders with a snowy garment, sat down steadily to stare, leaving her mother to grind tortillas alone. I must admit we had not hitherto met with any woman in the country whose notice was disconcerting to any but the most timid young man. After all, would any of our cottage girls be less rude to a foreigner, even though he were only a

Frenchman or some such frequent creation? We tried to utilize this young person's idleness by asking about the earthquakes, but she sat still in a picturesque shadow, rarely lit up by the quick fire flashes, and shyly pretended not to hear. I crossed over and lifted her up, in spite of little prim shrieks, and cries of "madre;" and so, holding her tightly, asked Barbachella to repeat the question. The hearty old mother stood by laughing, and I did not let the damsel go, though heaven knows there was little temptation to hold her, until, with many titters, she had explained that the first earthquake only had been felt at this place, which, as I have said, is only four leagues from Granada, and about the same distance from Mombacho.

Having seen the mules safely provided for, we strolled through the dusky streets under the guidance of Gulielmo, who led us to a hut where chocolate was sold. Therein sat a very old man, who remembered the times of Spanish rule, and since then "more governments than he could count." He told us stories of the earthquakes he had felt, and among other things mentioned that a great temple hidden upon a

neighbouring hill was thus thrown down only twenty years ago. He said that the Indians had changed much lately, having lost all memory of their fathers; no traces of their ancestral tongue were now to be gathered. He himself had forgotten everything. How much of this was true, how much merely suggested by mistrust and superstition, it would need a long stay with these people to tell. Many things he spoke of which I regret much to have lost. Among others, we heard a new theory for the existence of the Guatuso Indians, whom this old man asserted to be the original habitants of Zapatero, who did not take kindly to their missionaries, and finally fled, every soul of them, to the uninhabited forests of the Frio. The only confirmation of this tradition is that Zapatero is now utterly unpeopled, though the ruins of a church and village show that once it was not so. This story, however, does not in the least account for the white skin and fair hair which have gained these Indians the name of Guatuso.

Returning to the hut, we found the damsel on the watch, and her shy titters made me nervous.

Had she a father? He was at Leon. Had she a brother? No. Hurrah! My soul was light. There was no one to ask intentions.

Before sunrise we were in the saddle, and riding away from the damsel, who looked very sad and yellow in the grey dawn. Our road led through lovely thickets, tangled with flowering creepers and bright convolvulus, until reaching a forest, in which we straightway lost ourselves. Here was made the first trial of our animals' leaping. The points of a good mule are not, I found, those of the horse, but rather of the ass, or perhaps, rather still, of a deer. Flat hocks, for instance, are not approved; they are held to be signs of slowness. Round hocks, pointed hoofs, broad ears, and a head carried level, are considered good; and in jumping the mule decidedly shows something of the buck, though not disagreeably. Of course, she will never, unless specially trained, leap any obstacle which can be otherwise surmounted, but when there is no resource, she bounds over as lightly as a cat. I have seen a little mule of ten hands jump her own height with ease; and in our ride down the Serebpiqui we had such timber leaps as most

horses and men would have craned at had there been a gate.

After losing our way in a delightful jungle, more like the great forests of the East than any I had yet seen, we reached a clearing of tobacco and indigo, in which stood Don H. S——'s hacienda, about one o'clock. The young master was absent; so, after our thirty-six-mile trot, we lay down in the shadow of his house, and dined in sleeping.

About three o'clock the trampling of horses and the clatter of big spurs awoke us. Don H—— was most cordial; and on my presenting the letter, professed himself delighted to be of service. He was a specimen of Young Nicaragua, touched up by the Stoneyhurst education, where he had learnt to speak *French* fluently. This was an advantage under the circumstances; as M. Etienne's English, though *very* vigorous in expression, lacked depth. While dinner was preparing, our host politely took us over his cacao plantation, which was considerable, though not in the best district for such cultivation. The cacao tree is excessively fond of warmth; but from birth propriety aggravates it with in-

tolerable prudence. By the general contrariety of things, the luxury it loves especially disagrees with it, and an officious nurse is always at hand to preserve its complexion or its virtue. What a vexatious life the poor cacao must lead, ever struggling towards that maddening sunshine, ever sheltered by some device of man! At first sprouting the little tree finds by her side a slender young banana, tender and graceful as an elder sister, but always ready to interpose the silken leaves of decorum between the poor little cacao and her fierce lover. As she grows, the protecting banana grows too; there is no elopement from the shadow of those loving arms. But after five years' martyrdom—it is so hard to be preserved from such a bold lover—the young cacao thrills with joy; her guardian has ceased to grow, while she feels her own strength can yet shoot up five feet more. Higher and higher she presses her head through the silken leaves, until at length a man comes with his machete, and the useless guardian crashes down headlong. But alas for that ill-regulated young cacao! While all her eyes and all her wrath have been fixed upon

the pale banana, she has not watched that thick-leaved tree springing up beside her. Wildly now she stretches her arms towards the mortal kiss; a solid mat of foliage beats back the seducer, and defends her tenderly. Of all situations that tend to madness and suicide, the most maddening and the most suicidal for a young lady must be to find herself protected against her will.

At seven, or, in less favourable ground, eight years of age, the cacao begins to bear, yielding three harvests in the year, in January, May, and September. Each tree will bear from twenty to thirty pods, of a dark red or purple colour, rough on the skin, and about four inches long. Twenty-five pounds of nuts form a cajuela, worth twenty reals or two dollars; and a tree is generally estimated to pay eight to nine dollars per annum. Of late years the price of cacao has risen considerably, owing to the wanton destruction of plantations. M. Menier also has established an exportation so large that the home consumption has much decreased. It is, however, a comfort to reflect that M. Menier's chocolate is the genuine thing. His immense plantations near Dirioma are, I believe, most

perfect in their arrangements. Formerly also cacao-nuts were a legal currency in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, one nut being valued at the fortieth part of two and a half cents (!); but of late the practice has become infrequent in the larger villages, and we never saw it in use. The great enemies of this cultivation are the "pisotés," commonly, but improperly, called racoons; the guatuses, or red rabbits; and a species of wild cat, which we never had a shot at. The pisote is, without any exception, the most amusing pet I ever saw. His long taper nose, his inquisitive eyes, his monkey-like activity, and his immensely long tail, always held straight up, or whisking with mischievous rapidity, never fail to rouse laughter. He has notions of fun quite as keenly as a monkey, and if possible, is quicker in his leaps and gestures. When wild he goes in a troop of fifty or sixty, living in the trees, but sometimes descending to bathe. The "pisoté solo," or solitary racoon, I never met with, though I wandered far to get one in Ometepec. Mr. Byam says: "From some cause or other, which I never could discover, a racoon separates himself from the troop, and

turns hermit, and thus gains the name 'pisoté solo.'" I had long been looking out for a "solitary racoon;" but, though I had met hundreds and hundreds in troops, I had never been able to find a true hermit; for a racoon separated from his troop by accident is not a "pisoté solo." More fortunate than myself, Mr. Byam did subsequently meet with a hermit 'coon. "This was a true solitary racoon; he must have abjured the gambols of the troop, and sedulously taken to a hermit's employment, viz., eating, drinking, sleeping, and getting fat. There had been no racoons near the place for weeks, and he was far heavier than his livelier brethren; also, when the skin was off, the fat was half an inch deep down his back, and half of him roasted the same day proved a most excellent feast for several persons. . . . The meat was like excellent roe venison with plenty of fat, which that sort of venison does not possess. Though I shot many others by themselves subsequently, yet I am sure the above was the only true 'solitary racoon' that I saw within range of my gun, and that the others had only been separated from their companions by accident." I hope, at a future time, to study

this matter more thoroughly; but the hermits are so uncommon that one must depend on luck in searching for them. I may mention that a male and female "pisoté solo" were said to live near Muyogalpa, each keeping house by itself, but meeting by moonlight from time to time. This fact is very curious, if true, as the common pisoté is a day-living animal.

Not a soul had reached the hacienda from the municipality; and as to guides, we were assured that no human being had ever climbed two thousand feet up the mountain on this side. Don H—— promised to have cooked such meat as could be got, and offered us mules to reach an Indian hut about a league away, from which the ascent must begin. Although the municipality had thus deceived us, we went to dinner with some hope of success; but a rising ground, far from the summit, was pointed out to us as the highest climb hitherto.

After dinner we made ready forthe further journey, but, on entering the courtyard, were somewhat surprised to see our own mules saddled. They were quite fresh and ready, only Don H—— had proposed to lend us others. Of

course we mounted without any remark; but when, on looking round, no signs of provision were visible—not even the universal tortillas—we did venture to expostulate. "Oh, it's all right," said Don H——. "They have everything at the hut. The fact is, I am out of provisions myself." What could be done? We knew too well the capabilities of Indian housekeeping to expect help from those stores; but, on the other hand, we could not whip out revolvers, and turn upon the man who, a moment before had been our host—at least I could not; and, as to that, he had probably more revolvers than we, and fifty black-bearded vacqueros to use them. Barbachella looked at me, laughing in his big blonde beard, and I heard a mutter very like "'Cré gredin!" as he climbed into the saddle; but Don H—— rode cheerily ahead, and addressed us with such determined cordiality, that outward signs of ill-feeling became slightly ludicrous. A man sulking when he has a revolver on his thigh, is a sight about as absurd as one could wish to contemplate.

So we trotted pleasantly across the miles of deserted indigo, until reaching a belt of forest,

where we got up a little steeple-chase over the fallen timbers. In the time of Spanish rule the production of indigo in Nicaragua was very large, but since the independence it has continually decreased. In every part of the country thousands of acres lie deserted; and in every part of the jungle are massive ruins of long-dried vats. Down by the lake shore at Granada, and buried under a thick mat of vegetation, are walls and broken towers and stone pavements, which might be taken for ruins of a lost city. They are but the dye-works of Spanish planters. On every side the town these broken vats are to be found, and many of the largest are in a condition for use at an hour's notice. But I liked best those ruined baths and pavements by the lake shore. Some of the tanks still held a green and mouldering water, the haunt of noisome reptiles, such as we love to watch and shudder at. But to no careless passer-by did those strange habitants reveal themselves. At the first sound of crackling branches there was a swirl and a sway in the dank water, and a rustle under the sweeping foliage that trailed across the brim. When all was still again the green and purple slime broke

slowly over the surface, and strange, shining heads peered out between. Mighty frogs bubbled up, and lay prone among the ooze, dully staring; nameless beetles clambered about; pale newts rosè and sank, with a dim flash of crested tails. Here and there, too, shone the triangular head of a water-snake, and beyond, the grey coils of his long scaled body lay gleaming through the slime. Bright insects leaped, and flew, and dozed upon the surface; bright flowers spangled the drooping foliage. A garland of blue convolvulus dripped down among nameless horrors.

Once from the sheltered nook in which I watched my tank, I saw a glorious and an awful sight. Everything that day was still and stagnant as ever. The big frogs sprawled in quietness; the snakes lay peacefully outstretched; all was still as still could be, save for the leaping of the red spiders and the buzz of gay flies. I thought I knew the depths of that tank and all its mysteries. Its snakes, and its newts, and its toads were, I thought, among my friends, and I sat there pondering what a still and dreamy and careless life they lead, these reptiles that we fear. Suddenly a furious swirl, and a plunge,

and a boiling of the tank! The slime was driven hither and thither, and a space of black water bubbled in the midst. Such a writhing I beheld there, such a shapeless revelation of the depths! Dim and weird and awful among those swaying, struggling bodies, I saw the pale coils of a mighty snake. His twining links swept round and round in the blackness. The water lapped in great waves against the side: I strained my eyes in speechless horror. Then the water stilled again, and the purple curtain closed; then one by one the dull triangular heads pushed up, and oozy bubbles alone recalled the nightmare down beneath. The surface was still and slow and peaceful, but strolling back through the bright sunlight, under the flowery festoons, I fancied I could draw an unorthodox moral had it been my duty.

As we expected, the Indian hut was a mere shanty, occupied by an old woman and her son, who lived by hunting and a stray day's work. To my question about provisions, she answered, "Plenty of tasajo and frijoles." "Enough for all of us during three days?" I asked; but Don H—— had found a guitar, and was strumming

away at some barbarous air. Barbachella and I walked out of the hut, whereupon Don H—— mounted his horse, and with a shout of "adios," entered the forest at a gallop. Our host's larder was soon inventoried. Six tortillas, a few plantains, half a pound of cheese, two or three strips of "tasajo," and a basin of frijoles—food for seven men for three days!

Much disheartened, we decided to make a bold push for the top, and in case of failure to return at once, and tell the municipality a bit of our minds. Meantime I directed Mr. D—— to take the bearings of the mountain—which he never did.

The next morning was cold and drizzly, but we set out, carrying the whole larder of the hut. Our Indian guide assured us he knew the mountain up to a considerable height, having accompanied a certain Don who spent two days in an attempt to reach the crater in search of gold. As this gentleman insisted on being carried all the way, it is not so extraordinary that he failed in his object. The first note I made was of a trailing plant which stung like a nettle; the second was of a deluge, which continued all day. Every foot of the way had to be cut with

machetes, for the forest was blocked with a sort of clematis, bearing a small white flower. We could scarcely advance half a mile in the hour, and in many places no living thing but a snake or an elephant could have pierced the network. There is no water whatever on Mombacho; but the soldier and Gulielmo carried three or four heavy gourds full, tramping along under the load with that ease and endurance found among all native dwellers in the tropics. While the guide was cutting through a heavy mass of foliage, and we were standing in the chilly rain, I caught sight of a beautiful "corale" lying along the trunk of an immense tree. He had his tail in a small burrow, and his wet body glistened like a jewel. Going quietly below, I cut off his head with a bowie-knife, much to the delight of our party, who gave this snake a worse character than we had heard in Chontales. They said a man would die in a quarter of an hour after being bitten, his blood solidifying.

At the end of two hours' march, at a height of one thousand two hundred feet, the guide declared he knew the mountain no further, as the Don had only reached this point after two

days of triumphal progress. Accordingly we went to breakfast, sitting on a fallen cotton tree quite one hundred feet long. All the timber on Mombacho is very fine, and some of the trees would bear comparison with any of the oriental giants, except the Bornean "tapong." The rain, which never stayed, prevented us doing justice to the beauties of the path, if any there were, but our determination was strong to reach the summit. After breakfast, which reduced our provisions to three tortillas and four plantains, I called on Mr. D—— for the bearings of the peak —which he had not taken. In such a dense ocean of foliage, the summit could not have been seen at ten yards distance, and returning was out of the question. Steadily the rain came down, and steadily we went up, climbing ravines which showed the violence of the rains in their season, over fallen trees, and down precipitous cliffs, the aneroid still marking an ascent. After three hours of further toil we came out upon a peak two thousand six hundred feet above the lake. Here the ground was covered with tall papya trees, which fell at one blow of a machete; inside they were mere pith. Suddenly, close below,

we caught sight of the lake, and its position showed how far we had wandered from the proper track. At starting we were a league and a half from the shore, and now we found ourselves almost above it. We had, in fact, been wandering round and round the mountain, and the peak on which we stood was probably that pointed out to us the night before as the extreme limit of exploration. Taking a fresh departure, we climbed on for another hour, but on examining the aneroid I found a gain of only two hundred feet. Calling Barbachella to council, it was decided to take the back track.

About four o'clock we regained the hut, and I hastened, while it was still daylight, to sketch some statues lying in the indigo fields. Those still recognizable were seven in number; but many more lay round in shapeless fragments. Close by was a ruined cairn about twenty feet square, and we were told that several more had formerly stood here.

One figure represented a corpse, or sleeper, with singular fidelity. It was perfect to the waist, excepting the right arm, which was broken. The eyes were closed, nose round and

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SEPULCHRAL STATUARY OF NICARAGUA.

I. Fragment of a column or pedestal.—Chontales.
II. Broken statue of a sleeper, from the cairns below Mombacho.
III. Enigmatical figure—perhaps allegorical—from the cairns below Mombacho.

[*To face p.* 43.—Vol. II.

boldly drawn, mouth kindly and natural, but broken at the left corner. All the lines of the body were rounded, and the muscles of the neck, the cavities of the collar-bone, and the pectoral muscle, were all well suggested. The head was bare and bald, but round the forehead was a fringe of hair. This figure, so singularly truthful and simple, lay upon a shallow tablet of stone, which followed the outline of the shoulders. The round of the arms, the head, and the body, stood well up from the block, and the neck was almost hollowed out behind. This head was about life-size.

Another figure was very curious and complicated, having at top the head of a monkey, or some such animal, and below, a number of incomprehensible carvings, among which three female breasts in a row, and a phallus beneath, were alone to be deciphered.

The third was a square-cut stone covered with odd carvings and ornaments, some very bold and deep. It was probably a pedestal.

The fourth was valuable from its corroboration of the stories told us in Libertad. It was apparently intended for a bear; but as there are no

bears in Central America, it must represent some other animal badly drawn, or else the sculptors had a traditional remembrance of the "grizzly," or some such fearful monster.

The fifth figure was badly broken, and the head quite gone; but the Indian boy assured me it had once represented a woman with a child on her back. The head, neck, and upper arm of the child were still perfect, and the breasts of the woman could be made out with this assistance.

The sixth was a female figure unusually well drawn. The face stood out curiously from a flat circular tablet of stone which surrounded it—possibly intended for a head-dress. The features were broken and scarcely decipherable. The tablet fell back from the chin, leaving the neck boldly forward. The shoulders were well rounded, and the arms—what was left of them—more truthful than in any other statue we saw. The clavicle was well and boldly drawn, and the breasts natural. Under the broken left arm the ribs were accurately marked, and the hips defined with considerable truth. On the whole, this was very far the best-drawn statue we found in

Nicaragua. It was lost from the hips downwards. About life-size.

The last statue represented a sleeper, with very large ears and a wonderfully smug countenance. Excepting a crack at the left corner of the mouth, and a dint in his fat forehead, this face was perfect, and a more natural one no sculptor could draw. The arms were conventional, being utter absurdities, much in contrast to the face. This figure also was peculiar by the phallus. All these statues were of basalt.

In the house of a vacquero, near the hacienda, I found a large urn of the shoe shape common in Ometepec, but not used in Chontales. It was of terra cotta painted in rays or flames of scarlet, and at the "toe" end were two snakes in high relief. The length was twenty-three inches, height seventeen inches. A cinerary urn precisely like it, but much smaller, is engraved among my sketches of Ometepec pottery. The woman of the house told me she had herself discovered it among the stones of the cairns, and at that time the mouth was stopped with earth, which, of course, hid an incalculable treasure. At evening time she found it, and the still grey shades creeping

around the tomb so frightened her that she left it on the spot, to be opened in the blaze of noonday. Unlucky gossip that she was, the secret was told to a fast friend, a woman of strong mind, who advised her to keep all dark, and proposed they should go together in the morning to unearth the gold. It was a moonlight night, the gossip left early, and when they went in the morning to seek their fortunes, the urn lay empty on the cairn. A pretty quarrel ensued, and the deceitful "commadre" took advantage of it to quit the neighbourhood, doubtless to spend her treasure elsewhere. The other carried off the urn, and uses it as a water-jar unto this day.

These remains at the foot of Mombacho are, I think, peculiarly valuable. They appear to unite the styles and arts of the Chontals and the Ometepecans. The cairn of rough stones is peculiar to the former race, the shoe-like cinerary urn, and the painting of that pottery, belong to the latter. The statues themselves, also, while preserving the simplicity of Chontales portraiture, show the superior skill of Niquiran sculpture. Perhaps the point most important is

the distinction of sex, which we never found marked in Chontales, except by softness of feature and difference of head-dress. This, however, is to be noticed on all the statues of Ometepec, Zapatero, and Momotombo. I think any further cairns which may exist near Mombacho would most likely contain many evidences of this interchange of thought and manners between Chontales and Ometepec; but we ourselves could hear of no more. In fact, I think the reader will see the difficulty of antiquarian research in Central America. The mestizo population know nothing and care nothing about such things; and their minds are so full of yards of cotton and manzanas of maize, that any most wonderful remains they may find in their jungle wanderings are forgotten within a month. Whereunto shall I liken this generation, oh seers of Manchester and prophets of Liverpool? The Indians, on the other hand, full of exalted traditions of their forefathers, and deeply revering, if not worshipping, every stone which those forefathers reared, will rarely assist the explorer in his search, and will take every opportunity to dishearten him and turn him back. As a last

resource, they will use violence to preserve the sacred relics; or they will destroy them with their own hands, and bury the fragments. In a country like Chontales, where Indians, or indeed any other population, are exceedingly few, no attempt will probably be made to oppose research, but in more thickly peopled districts it is otherwise. The descendants of the sculptors, fervent Christians though they be, can still find room in their hearts for other worship besides the Virgin and the very ugly saints provided for them—and the old gods come in for a share more than equal in times of trouble. A gentleman in Granada, whose house is near a broken idol with a wide mouth, called "La Boca," which stands at the corner of a street, told me that when a revolution is imminent, and during its progress, the gaping mouth of this statue is every morning crammed with flowers, which the watchful priests remove at daylight. I asked him why they did not keep guard over the idol during the night, to prevent such a scandal. He replied they neither dared nor cared. Appearances are kept up by early rising, and a walk in the dawn, and that is all wanted. (Who can avoid sympathy

with such a worthy priesthood and such a clear-sighted people?) A native gentleman told us he firmly believed, if the white and mestizo element were removed from the country, that the Indians would recommence human sacrifices within a year, and fill the lips of "La Boca" with offerings less graceful than flowers. I fancy Mr. Squier or Dr. Frœbel mentions having seen this curious aspect of Indian Christianity.

Next morning we rode back to Granada, having satisfactorily settled that the earthquakes did not come from Mombacho. In passing the hills behind Dirioma a curious trail was crossed, belonging, we were told, to an animal with the body and tail of a mule and the head of an ox. I forget its name, but we heard of it several times. The slot was like that of a mule, but deeper, and the setting-down of the feet like a camel.

The day after our return arrived the Lake steamer, which we were awaiting. She brought up an English engineer officer, a purser for the Consuelo Gold Company, and many miners from Cornwall and Ireland. Two days later we

started for Virgin Bay, the Lake debarcation of the Californian Transit route. Mr. Jebb and I had an accident in going on board, which might have been final to both of us, but Fate preserved us for other fortunes.

CHAPTER II.

Sailing on the lake—Capt. Pim's opinion—Canal projects—The old transit—Seeing the world—Lost in the jungle—Second attempt to make a Frio exploration—Muyogalpa—Indian belles—Coyoté—Why dogs bark—Tropical nature—Ometepec—"Free lover" sect—Squirrel story—Congo story—Snake story—Story of a priest and a murder—King vulture—Antiquities—Burials—Pottery—Ornaments—The lust of the eyes and the pride of life—Across the lake—Narrow escape—Two pictures—A lonely life among the orange trees—San Juan del Sur—Rivas—Political affairs—The filibusters—General Walker—Stirring news—Ride to Granada.

THE Lake of Nicaragua is, without any exception, the most dangerous sheet of water I ever sailed over. The Transit Company has already lost seven steamers in it, every one of which was simply blown ashore or swamped. Winds gather behind the volcanic peaks of Ometepec, Madera, and Zapatero, and sweep round with whirlwind violence from half a dozen points at once. A calm is rare, but a storm or tornado is the commonest thing pos-

sible, and within ten minutes the waves will reach their highest fury. Well may Captain Bedford Pim cry he will never despise a fresh-water sailor after cruising on Lake Nicaragua. I never saw sea or ocean that could compare with it in violence or treachery.

Virgin Bay, which we reached in a very pretty cyclone, is situated on the narrow neck of land which separates the lake from the cove of San Juan del Sur on the Pacific Ocean. The broad, well-kept Transit road from one debarcation to the other is only twelve miles long, and the insignificance of this impediment between the two waters has naturally drawn most canal projects to this spot. A most complete survey was made by Captain Baily at the desire of General Morazan, at that time President of the Central American Confederation. Captain Baily was employed three years in careful examination of the country, and for this labour I believe he never received one farthing of pay. The quality of San Juan del Sur as a port may be guessed from the fact that Sir E. Belcher sailed down as far as the Bay of Salinas in search of this place, "without having observed

anything like a river or *port*." The bay is quite open to the sea, and during the rainy months the winds are very violent and landing bad.

About three miles from San Juan del Sur the chain of mountains which passes from end to end of the American continent begins to rise. At the highest point over which the canal would be made to pass the elevation is 615 feet from the Pacific; the surface of the Lake itself being 128 feet 3 inches above the ocean. Captain Baily proposed to take his canal in a winding course among the ravines to the river Lajos, which falls into the Lake, and the projected length was about $15\frac{2}{3}$ miles. "According to this plan, in the first eight miles only one lock is necessary. In the next mile 64 feet of lockage are required. In the next three miles there are about two miles of deep cutting and one mile of tunnel, and then a descent of 200 feet in three miles by lockage to the Pacific. . . The total length of the canal from sea to sea would be little short of 200 miles, viz., $15\frac{1}{2}$ from the Pacific to the Lake, $56\frac{1}{2}$ across the Lake, and 119 to the Atlantic; total, 191 miles.

The estimate is—

From the lake to the west-end of the tunnel ..	£1,500,000
Descent to the Pacific	500,000
From the Atlantic by canal along the San Juan	2,500,000
	£4,500,000*

Between this scheme of Captain Baily's, and that by the river Titipapa and Lake Managua, first proposed by the present Emperor of the French, lie the present projects for Nicaraguan canalization.

But it seems very probable that this water communication will never be carried through. Captain Bedford Pim says—"That such an idea is a great conception cannot be denied; but in my opinion it would practically be one of the greatest failures of the age. It would in reality be a return to the stage-coach travel of a former period, for time, not distance, has now become the true measure of space; and it must be borne in mind that for a *sailing vessel*, the time occupied from England to India would be *longer*, *viâ* a canal through Nicaragua, than it would be by a voyage round the Cape of Good Hope." Captain Pim, as most active people know, or should

* From "The Gate of the Pacific." Captain Bedford Pim.

know, has long been meditating a railroad across Nicaragua from Monkey Point, or the bay behind it called Gorgon Bay, to the port of Realejo on the Pacific coast. The entire length of the line would be 225 miles, and taking the estimate of Mr. G. F. Griffin, C.E., and Messrs. Head, Ashby, and Co., ironfounders, Captain Pim is of opinion that such a line might be constructed for 1,000,000*l.* sterling.*

In the flourishing times of the old Transit Company the yearly draft of passengers each way was between twenty and twenty-five thousand, but rarely much under the latter number. At present six to ten thousand is the average. M. Scherzer estimates the number in 1852 and 1854 at three thousand a month, but this appears to be much over the mark. That pleasant writer thus describes the scene in those days. "Formerly the plan was so arranged that a few hours after the magnificent steamers of the Lake had landed their passengers at La Virgen, the

* In regard to this most important subject, with which every Englishman should be acquainted, I must refer the reader to Captain Pim's "Gate of the Pacific," as I do not feel qualified to discuss it. Certainly, in traversing a very great portion of the rout proposed, we saw no obstacles whatever.

countless throng of Californians with their pack-horses and mules came rolling in like a tide. The spectacle lasted but a few hours—at most not more than a day; but very striking and picturesque was this brief and sudden meeting of active and energetic men from all the regions of the earth. What other corner of the world could present to the artist such groups of romantic-looking figures, some so glowing hot with fervid passion that they almost seem to emit sparks; some hard, cold, rugged as rocks; and others again worn and old, and decaying before their time under the effects of the hardships and reverses of their stormy existence? What work might there be for a confessor in La Virgen, could these men be induced to pour into his ears the story of their past lives, their sins and sufferings, and in many cases adventures more wild and terrible than ever haunted the imagination of a Hoffman or a Eugène Sue, and life histories of fearful serpent-like fascination!" *

M. Scherzer, and indeed every other traveller of that period, gives La Virgen a dread-

* Dr. Scherzer's "Travels in the Free States of Central America."

fully bad character, but at present it is a quiet, harmless little place enough. The office of the Transit Company is rather a pretty building of timber, painted snowy white, and well preserved. Several hotels also and stores have been brought from the States and put up upon the spot, but of course they belong to foreigners exclusively;—he would be a bold "Greaser" who set up a bar in Virgin Bay. The antagonism which exists between the American of the States and all other people whatever—after all, I believe the Englishman, both collectively and individually, is most "sympathetic" with him—is especially roused by the sight of a Spanish-speaking Creole. The long course of turbulence in California and Texas, where, as I have heard the doers themselves say with a laugh, no one thought more of shooting down a "Greaser" than an Indian, has imbued the whole Anglo-American race with a contempt and dislike for all of Spanish blood, more profound, I believe, than for the negro himself. That the two stocks cannot live together on the same continent I am convinced, and it requires no prophet to tell us which must "go under."

My first stay at the Saint Charles Hotel, kept by an Englishman, Mr. Garrard, was only for two or three days. After riding over to San Juan del Sur, and leaving Mr. Jebb there to try the virtues of sea-bathing, I at once sought for a canoe to take me across to Ometepec. This, however, though much easier of late years, is not to be accomplished without some delay, for the Indians are still very jealous of foreign approach. In company with Mr. Garrard, I several times rode over to Rivas, a town of great historical interest lying about seven miles from Virgin Bay. I remember we took one ride with a young gentleman from San Francisco, who was sent out by his father to see the world and pick up experience. This of course was best to be done in Nicaragua, and from thence he returned straight home. After all, perhaps, he did wisely. San Francisco is, I believe, a most civilized city; and if this gentleman had already graduated there, he might have found a less perfect school than Nicaragua for the study of that "other side" not included in correct curricula. We met him in various stages of his "progress," and he was an unfailing source

of wonder and delight. I recollect that on this occasion we all lost ourselves in the forest; but I finally struck Mr. Garrard's trail, and we got safely home after a severe steeple-chase through the wood. The sagacity of our companion's mule took him back, or he might have fared as did a poor Californian a month before, who got lost near Castillo while the steamer stayed there, and was discovered seventeen days after, having eaten nothing but berries during that time. Oh! it is a terror of which we cannot dream in the temperate zone, to feel lost in the grand forests of the tropics! A man may starve to death anywhere, but with us he would at least die peacefully at the foot of some pitying tree: in the tropics there is no peace for the weak. Life struggles with life so furiously, that at the first sign of decay, a thousand hideous, pitiless enemies are edging and crowding round. Heaven help the sick, the wounded, and the helpless, in the teeming jungle! They must die a million deaths, a million deaths before the end comes. Ants, and vultures, and foul flies buzz and circle round them; nameless scavengers are ever on their hungry watch. Woe to the wretch whose

strength can no longer awe that creeping, leaping, hideous swarm. Reader, if you could embody to yourself the ghastly sight I have before me, you would change your pet nightmare in its favour.

From Virgin Bay we wrote to Mr. Hollenbeck, at Greytown, informing him that we had raised seventeen volunteers, all "good men and true," for the Rio Frio expedition, and requesting him to offer the command to Captain P——, of whom I have already spoken. We also proposed to pay the expenses of the exploration. On my return from Ometepec I received that gentleman's answer, which contained a proposition to which we could not accede; and thus ended our second failure to stir up the Guatusos.

While in treaty for a passage to Ometepec for Sammy and myself—Mr. D—— we had sent back to England, and Ellis was nursing Mr. Jebb,—a party of American miners, "prospecting," invited me to cross in their large boat. I was only too delighted to accept, and we ran across without any difficulty; a little water was shipped, and most of the party very sea-sick. After six hours' sailing we got under the lee of

the mountain, where the water lay still as a mirror. After much search, and two hours' pull, we made the landing-place of Muyogalpa, where, under the shade of a giant tree, we beached the boat. Leaving two of our party to light the fire, I walked, under the guidance of Mr. Case, up a broad and darkening road, bordered with groves of plantain, bread-fruit, papya, orange, zapoté, coyol, and cocoa-nut. In the daylight we should have seen pyramids of blossom fencing in every hut, mighty trees clothed with trailing moss, and tender, lace-like vegetation. A lovely wilderness is the village of Muyogalpa—a beauty careless of her wildness, a wilderness indifferent to its beauty.

After penetrating into two or three cane-built huts, where the red fire flashed amidst dun shadows, and fierce dogs leapt at us open-mouthed, we reached the dwelling of a Mrs. Campe, the widow of a German long resident here. I made an arrangement to stay at her house, which boasted two rooms, and we returned to the boat with provisions. Our friends had already set three or four fires alight, and were deep in a laughing war with the Indian girls

who had come down to fill their pitchers. Five or six black shadows were stalking in the dusk near by, but they made no attempt to trouble this new-risen friendship. Verily, though the skin of our English love be white as her innocence, and red as bright blood can stain, yet in the gay firelight, under the dusky forest trees, it shall not make so fine a show as the golden bronze of an Indian dryad. The eyes of our love may softly shine with all the virtues; but whilst the azure smoke curls up amongst the leaves, a laughing glance and a wicked jeer will be more apt to move the pulse. White faces, low glances, and ribands of maidenly blue, are pretty things enough under the trees of Richmond; but in those picnics where the gentlemen stride about the fire in knee-boots, and flirt while polishing their revolvers, such delicate charming would, in all innocence, be cut out by the first yellow nymph whose wild black eyes sparkled within the red circle.

After supper we stretched ourselves in the canoes and boats lying round, and smoked the native weed until dropping off to sleep. In the first quarter of that chilly hour before dawn,

when the damp rawness rouses the sleepy traveller to throw wood upon his dying fire, I awoke and looked over the canoe side. The air was dank as if on a mountain top, and a thick mist from the lake hung amidst the fringed boughs overhead. Raw, and dark, and cheerless the view was as ever I saw one; so, with a shiver and a kick of frozen feet, I was about to roll over, when I became aware of a large animal close by. In the mist he looked quite white, and almost as big as a small donkey. In another glance I made out two or three more of the same likeness. They seemed quiet enough, whatever they were, standing still about a yard off, and I finally concluded them to be dogs from the village. On my kicking the canoe they retired further away, and I was lying down again, when from a bongo close by came a shout, "Cuidad! Coyoté!" and then a volley of stones, which caused a yelping among the pack. The dweller in the bongo assured me they would not return, as curiosity alone had probably brought them round; and I fell asleep again in a moment.

The "coyoté" are the wolves of Central

America, but in appearance they more resemble dogs. Mr. Byam would seem to think they are descendants of real Cuban bloodhounds; but, though very far from pitting my youthful ignorance against the experience of that notable woodsman, I cannot believe this to be the case. Dogs will never go wild so long as they can find a master to serve, and more especially trained dogs. Colour, indeed, is almost the only point of likeness I can see between the coyoté and the bloodhound, and even this disappears in the more northern habitat, for in Mexico the skin is nearly white. The coyoté never barks, and only gallops when pursued. In regard to the first of these points, says Mr. Byam, "a remark made by an old Indian struck me much. 'Why won't these coyotés bark like other dogs?' I said to him, pointing to one I was trying to reclaim, 'and why do they only howl, and the pups grunt?' His answer was . . . 'He won't learn.' 'Not learn,' said I, 'what do you mean?' 'No,' he replied, 'not learn; for if he was of an honest breed, he would bark, to try and imitate his master, or at all events the other dogs; but all barking proceeds from dogs imitating their

masters' shout. The master shouts, to frighten *away* cattle from his maize-ground—the dog barks directly; the master shouts to drive *in* cattle to the corral, and the dog barks also. In fact, the dog imitates his master when he barks: he tries to speak, but cannot.'" I give this curious observation as the only attempt I ever heard to account for the barking of our tame dogs. *No* wild breeds make any noise except howling and snarling, nor, under the best circumstances, will they learn to bark until the third or fourth generation, a length of trial which Mr. Byam does not appear to have given the coyoté. But it is not a fact that "howlers" cannot be trained to defend their master, or do scientific hunting. The little Dyak dogs, which cannot bark, are admirably tame and sagacious. I afterwards met this pack of coyotés on the other side the town, but they slank off at sight of us. We heard it was the only one on the island, though game of every sort abounds.

In the morning we went to breakfast at Mrs. Campe's; and after that meal I bade farewell to Mr. Case and his party, wishing them all possible success in the gold mine they had struck

behind Castillo. I then took a walk in search of antiques, and met with some success in the cottages along the tangled shore. What words have I to describe the feathery groves of acacia through which I made my way,—the mighty trees that bore a world upon their airy shoulders! The delicate loveliness of the tropics is not to be seen in a brute mass, like a mountain or a sea; it should be studied in bits, in nooks, in fairy grottoes. Nine men out of ten, when they sail for one or other India, expect to behold Nature like a transformation-scene, all palm trees, and pagodas, and flowers a yard across, and lovely yellow fairies, with golden bangles and susceptible hearts, flirting fans in flower-girt doorways. The emigrant lands, and of his raptured vision finds no trace save a few ragged cocoa-palms. As he goes inland, even these "properties" disappear, and for miles of road he can see nothing but trees, of much the same colour and shape as those he has played under all his life. The vegetation does not strike him as wonderful; the flowers he has all seen before; the people are ugly, and probably insolent: in a whole week he will not meet a snake or a lion, nor

have an adventure with any person or any thing. If a candid man, he straightway writes home that the Tropics are a "humbug;" an exposure which does not in the least affect the gorgeous vision which his younger brother brings out, when he comes to join partnership.

I think when this transformation idea has been burnt out of the man by sun-heat, washed out of him by rains, and beaten out of him by the real hard life of these lands, he begins to form another theory about the beauties of his home. He perceives, generally with some suddenness, that the foliage he had thought so commonplace is softer and brighter than the fairest of his own clime. If he but cast his eyes to the tree-tops, or into the forest shadows, he sees flowers such as he had *not* known at Kew, or Sydenham, or even Drury Lane. He finds that lions are to be found when least expected, and that every hole contains a living jewel called a snake. At length the leaf of the banana is seen to bear a silk more silken than Europe or China can weave; and somehow, entire Nature seems grander, and more creative, and more stilly beautiful in the Tropics. And then he comes back

to settle down in England; and he takes rooms in Hanover Square, and drinks twelve tumblers a night at the Oriental, thinking, but talking not, of the glory stamped into his soul.

The island of Ometepec is about fifteen miles in diameter; it produces Indians, antiques, and tobacco in considerable quantities. The number of the inhabitants is said to be declining even more than on the mainland; but no document upon this, or indeed any other subject, is published by the Government. Formerly this island was more densely populated than any part of Nicaragua, but much land is quite barren. The southern and western shores are seamed and riven in every direction, and the lava-flows of a hundred eruptions are piled up, one bed above another. At present the twin volcanoes of Ometepec and Madera, which guard its shores, are quite still; but of late years the thick veil which scarcely ever drew itself from the former peak has thinned and disappeared. I only once saw the phenomenon, which is now as rare as it was formerly common. One morning at sunrise, in stepping out of Mrs. Campe's, I glanced up at the lofty peak which hung overhead, and for a

moment thought it was covered with snow. I almost rubbed my eyes, and examined more closely. The snow-like appearance was caused by a mass of solid white cloud, fitting each peak and cavity as if lying upon it, and abruptly severed half-way down the side. No light cirri floated round. This volcano is comparatively easy to climb; and a party of American gentlemen have already recorded their names upon its top, which would seem to be a marsh.

From the time of the Spanish Conquest, to Walker's filibustering war, Ometepec was an Indian reservation, governed by its own officers, and unapproachable to settlers of European descent, except by permission of the Indian authorities. Walker, however, with his usual recklessness, did away with these privileges, transforming the island into a hospital for his wounded and a sanctuary for the women and children; the consequence of which measure was, that one morning the Indians came down from Pueblo Grande, the principal village, and killed every wounded filibuster they could find, losing, however, three times the number of their own men. It is pleasant to add that the women

and children were not harmed. After the final expulsion of Walker, the Government of Nicaragua continued, without a shadow of right, to disregard the privileges of the Indian reservations, studiously avoiding all complaints. At present, though nine-tenths of the people of Ometepec are Indians of pure blood, men of European, mixed, or negro race settle on the island wherever they please, and the natives are powerless to assert their just claims. Nevertheless they keep the actual soil, and although unable to hinder the settlement of men from the mainland, they are still powerful enough in their right to prevent the invader from claiming ownership of the land. When a squatter dies, or leaves the island, the ground brought under cultivation returns to the general possession of the Indians, and no allowance is made to him or his heirs for the improvements he may have wrought.

The village of Muyogalpa* covers a considerable space; but its population is not more than two hundred and fifty persons, of whom a great portion are mestizo. Some years ago an amiable

* From the Aztec "Muyotl-galpa," "Town of Mosquitoes."

sect, which was not properly appreciated in the States, emigrated in a body to this neighbourhood, under the guidance of a certain Tyler, who managed to swindle them out of considerable property, with discourses about "common stock," and so forth. A few of these people still linger about; but Dr. Tyler has been dead a year, and there is a wrangle for his miserable property. This kindly sect was called "The Free Lovers," and its peculiar tenets may thus be guessed. Feeling some interest in such an anachronism, I made inquiry as to the ages, looks, and so forth, of the believers; and I learned that few of the ladies, and none of the gentlemen, were under forty years of age, and that the younger matrons did not seem at all anxious to return to the States, though perfectly willing to go elsewhere with anybody. Dr. Tyler swindled every one of them that had any money; and, in fact, the whole party seem to have been silly old maids, tottery old gentlemen, or young women anxious not to trouble the New York police. There is great improvement for the mind in contemplating the remains of this sect in 1865.

I have already described an Indian village; and Muyogalpa is very like Masaya or Dirioma on a smaller scale. Cane huts, bare yards, fluttering palms, and piles of blossom, line the broad streets; and gold-spangled orange trees embower the dwellings. The inhabitants are stealthy, dark-looking men, ugly women, and naked, pot-bellied children. During the ten days I passed on the island I did not see a young-looking girl or boy; all had the dreary, glassy-eyed expression of distrust which is the only inheritance the Spaniards have left them. My time was passed in excavating, in wandering through the woods, and in chatting with Mrs. Campe, who has spent seventeen years in the island—nine months in a filthy prison during the filibuster war, although she had lived eight years among the Indians at that time. Mr. Case and his party paid me several visits, for contrary winds detained them on the coast, and I was daily expecting Mr. Jebb. One sunset, in returning alone after bidding my friends a last farewell, I found myself in a deep-cut path, overhung with flowers and feathery crowns of grass. In stooping over the caked trail of a big

snake, not long passed, and intent on a calculation of his size,* I was suddenly roused by a thundering tramp of cattle, and looking up, saw three bulls tearing towards me at full speed. At first I thought of putting a bullet through the foremost, in Chontales fashion, but on the instant a vacquero dashed over the hill-crown in pursuit, and a narrow training in early life caused me a prejudice against "plugging" him too; so I slung my rifle and caught at a bough. From a comfortable seat in the tree I watched the chase below until it passed an angle; simultaneously with which event was the attack of ten thousand red ants, who marched upon me en échelon, and charged with the deadly bayonet. On the point of dropping, I caught sight of a pretty piebald squirrel springing about above me, and pecking the branches from time to time with great eagerness. I felt sure he could and did see me; but with no signs of fear he went earnestly on in his business, and I forgot the delicacy of roasted squirrel in watching the odd

* On a hard, dusty road the size of a snake can usually be guessed by the space between the "axes" of his trail,—that is, the points where muscular strain comes in wriggling along. On a hard road such points can be marked, but not after rain.

movements. At length I found he was eating ants, and at the same moment I observed that *they* were eating *me*. Leaping to the ground, I listened with attention to an argument between my appetite and my philozoic leanings. "Roasted squirrel," urged the one party, "is a dish of that succulence, it may be likened to the sweetest things on earth—to 'huîtres aux truffes,' to the soft lips of your love, to the paces of your Jumenton!" "A squirrel eating ants," prosed the other side, "is, we believe, a phenomenon never yet noted. The flesh of those small apterous insects is well known to be a stong irritant poison. Reflect upon the subject, oh my friend! Get up a bran-new theory, and read a paper to the Zoological." "How can any honour at a future time, or any pleasure that lies in this earth or in the waters that are beneath, compensate you (moriturum) for the *stewed* squirrel you might taste to-night? Think of Mrs. Campe's masterly style! Think of that delicate rodent you ate the other day!" "A squirrel is not a rodent," cried the other; "he bel——" At this moment the "object" whisked his pert tail, and slipped through the green frise

of fern, pushing aside his fairy curtain of hanging moss.*

Upon another occasion I went, with Mr. Campe and a tall Indian, to seek some figures which formerly lay among the thorny acacias on the lake shore. The statues had probably been hidden again by the natives, and the excavations we made did not bring to light any perfect specimens of pottery. But the strangest chance befell me that day. I was anxious to secure a young congo, or howling monkey, to take to England for study, and looked for a female carrying baby. On that day I met with three. The first was just after dawn, as I took a stroll through the dewy savannah, in search of breakfast. Their thundering howl was audible on every side, and I soon found a troop. The old males sat, hideous and lazy, on boughs within reach of my ramrod; but the females with young kept out of sight, at the very tops of the tallest trees, and for some time I could not make one out. The congo is a stupid, sleepy animal, quite uninteresting save for his won-

* I have no explanation to offer of this circumstance. I have seen squirrels wonderfully bold, but never eating before an intruder. It is most probable the ants were taken as an urgent medicine.

derful voice, which must be heard to be realized. I am quite sure had Cortes, or Pizarro, or the bravest man among the Spaniards, been greeted on landing by a howl from a few of these strange beasts, he must have run in panic. I can scarcely fancy a trial of the nerves more severe than, without warning or knowledge, to hear that ferocious thunder. Picture yourself, at dusk, in a still forest such as the congo loves, where the autumns of a thousand years have strewn the ground with a silent shroud of black decay; where the grey trunks, stately and endless, shoot up towards an unseen heaven; where the foot sinks noiseless into oozy soil, and the sharp crackle of a stick alone breaks the stillness. To the wanderer in such a jungle, at sundown, the heavy, dank air suddenly quivers with a hoarse and rumbling howl, echoing and re-echoing from tree to tree, and taken up in thunder on every glade. Louder, and seemingly nearer, it rolls; the air is loaded with ferocious threatenings. Surely, of this kind was the cry of the plesiosaurus! With a roar like this the pterodactyl swooped to his prey! But now the awful sounds which panic-struck the

elder world come from a dingy baboon, not much respected in his own family, and quite unable to do mischief. The congo is not uncommon in Europe, but he will not be found in the woods; on the contrary.

At length I caught sight of a fat old female, with her baby on her back, and fired. In dropping, she turned—as monkeys so fondly will—to save the little one from hurt; but her care was useless — the bullet had passed through mother and child. This was the first fatality. At noon, while we were excavating in a deep old forest, I caught sight of two congos, with two babies, sitting on a great branch. Never was I so struck with the vast height of the trees as when watching those baboons. In a glance hither and thither, in searching for game, or in weary tramping, one does not really conceive the stature of these tree-giants; but, standing quietly, their size so filled my fancy that I almost doubted whether an ordinary charge would throw a ball so high. By shouting we made the lazy beasts move, and one of the little ones climbed on its mother's back. This was the moment, and I fired. To our amazement a

tiny baby came hurtling down, with a bullet through his skull. As I pulled trigger the second young one must have passed its mother's friend, and the distance was too great for us to distinguish. This was the second fatality. Before the third took place, at evening, we had a funny snake-hunt. I wounded a little rabbit, and the dogs dashed after it through the bush, followed by Sammy. As I reloaded my smooth-bore, the brutes set up a worrying bark, which showed they had at bay some animal too fierce for attack. Having already tried their strength and courage, I knew it must be a large snake or tiger which had crossed the rabbit's trail, and dashed to the spot where Sammy was screaming. "A snake, sir! A great snake, sir! Oh, look out, sir!" The dogs were barking furiously round a bush, and just as I came up, a glossy head, holding a rabbit in its jaws, slipped from under the foliage, and a long body of brown satin glided after. I put a bullet through his graceful spine, but he moved on swiftly. Knowing a spring was impossible, I snatched a machete from the Indian, and tried to intercept him; but Sammy, in wild panic, cried, "Oh, sir!

Oh, sir! There's a snake under your feet! He's going to spring, sir!" And I, seeing something alive by my boots, jumped at a bough, and swung myself up like a monkey. But, behold! Sammy's snake was the poor little rabbit, which crept away with its fur all rough and slimy. I'm sure I hope it recovered, and escaped all enemies for the rest of its life.

The snake was now under thick cover, thanks to Sammy's folly, and I had to waste two more bullets before going in at him. With a backbone broken in three places, the most active reptile is not very dangerous; so I crept behind, and dragged him out by his glossy tail. The strength of his resistance, and his weight, were enormous, but at length I swung the tail over my shoulder, and so hauled him forth triumphantly. He proved to be of the kind called boba or bova—a genus to be ever distinguished from the tuboba, which is so called, no doubt, as being more formidable than *two* bobas. The latter, in fact, is not a poisonous snake, but a constrictor, and I presume our "boa" comes from the Portuguese pronunciation of this word. His jaws will give a severe bite, and he will

break a rib or so if he gets a chance. My specimen on this occasion was eleven feet nine inches long, and about as thick as the calf of a man's leg. He was beautifully silken and glossy. While skinning him I saw another congo with young, and this time I brought down the mother without her baby, which hung clinging to the bough. After this third disaster I felt superstitious, and left the little congos alone.

To tell all the funny chances that befell me in those idle days on Ometepec, the fairy nooks I found, the strange creatures I noted; to paint—if I could—the beauty and the sweet grandeur of this little island, would need half my volume; but I will tell one more rambling story, and go on to matters of more importance. Not of more interest to me. The varied leaves of the trees, the waving of the palms, the strange pink buds of the plantain, are, to one upon the spot, as full of charm as his search after lost history. And, after all, which *is* the more important? Or is either important?*

Once upon a time, then, I had walked along

* "There's nothing new, and there's nothing true, and it don't matter."—Philosophical formula.

the shore in search of an Indian burial-ground, said to be not far distant. Returning comfortably along with a fat Muscovy duck on my shoulder—I strongly suspect him to have been private property, but he was by himself on the shore, and he rose freely,—I thought to take a short cut over a small savannah grown with neglected indigo, through the forest, and by some tobacco fields, to Muyogalpa. The sun was setting above Mombacho, as I turned my back upon the glowing lake; the savannah shone crimson in the level rays; the forest glittered round in red and gold and orange, or lay back in tawny shade. Lovely beyond all words of loveliness the scene appeared as I sat upon the highest rock to rest after my climb. Suddenly a wild turkey called, and I went into the wood to seek him. While peering about among the dazzling trees, I heard a great flapping of wings, and a large bird lit upon a branch hard by. At a glance I recognized the beautiful king vulture, for Mr. Jebb had shot one at Consuelo, and described to me its loveliness. Who could believe such delicate plumage was glossed and sleeked with the filthiest

carrion? The moral is as old as speech, but one feels it afresh in looking at the Re Zopilote.

The specimen I saw on Ometepec was probably about thirty inches from head to tail; but all vultures are very unequal in size. The naked head of their king is covered with a scarlet skin, rough and hanging. The neck is brightest crimson and orange, and a soft grey ruff encircles it. The back and upper wing are of delicate cream colour, fading into purest white on the belly. The wing-plumes and tail, blue black, and the strong legs red.

For a while I stood and looked at this beautiful horror, but after the congo tragedy, I could not shoot it. He is a bold man who will skin a zopilote, and a hero dare not carry the reeking trophy about with him. So, after a time, I walked back to the savannah, and through the dusky forest towards Muyogalpa. Large tobacco fields were on my way, on nearing which the report of a gun reached me. In a quarter of an hour I came to the hedge of wild pineapple, and by a new-made gap marked drops of blood. Among them were the footprints of an Indian

easily known by the inturned toes. That fellow has had better luck than I, I thought; he must have bagged a guatuse or javalino to make so much blood. But I knew my big Muscovy was worth a dozen of such game so far as eating went. So I trudged on happily.*

Six or seven days afterwards, Mrs. Campe told me the last stroke which the cura of Muyogalpa had put to a long career of varied rascality. Suspecting that his tobacco crop was nightly thinned, he lay in wait under the hedge, and on seeing an old Indian climbing over a gap, which I myself and every one else in the village had used, this worthy pastor fired. Returning to the plaza, with his gun still in hand, he boasted openly of the feat, assuring every one that his aim was so true he must have hit the mark. For a while his flock found *comfort* in the reflection that their pastor was such a liar, his story was most likely to be false, but after some days an old man was found mortally wounded in a retired hut. All dark races, when

* The delicious Muscovy duck should be stuffed with peeled sugar-cane; and spikes of the same, with a little bitter orange, should be stuck all over its fleshy parts. I dedicate this dream-like dish to my brother travellers.

converted to Christianity, develop an hysterical superstition, which may be horrible or ludicrous according to circumstances, but the form of Romanism practised in this country has peculiar features. Its doctrine may shortly be called Priest Deification. A curate takes a fancy to gin, roams about the streets mad drunk, fights and swears and blasphemes in sight of all the town, raves with delirium tremens;—he is still the priest and the deity. No one dreams of complaint, or if a sense of the incongruity should strike a humorous parishioner, he neither dares nor cares to put such heresy into words. Nothing whatever was done at Muyogalpa during my stay. No word of blame was addressed to the cura, no complaint lodged with the authorities, whether civil or ecclesiastic. On Sunday he performed in church, and with hands fresh stained with the murder of an aged man he gave the sacrament to his parishioners. After laughing with his friends over the old man's death, standing in the street outside his door, he went straight to the confessional to hear and punish the venial sins of his flock. Here is a gay moral for you, my Christian friends! Who

would say the world lacks faith after such a sight as this?

"The character of the priests in Spanish America, with *very* few exceptions, is grossly immoral and corrupt. Nearly all publicly live in concubinage, and a great number drink and gamble. Such being their own character, they can hardly be expected to inculcate morality in others; yet their supposed sacred character makes them worshipped by the lower orders, though they are ridiculed and despised by the more educated."*

Mr. Dunlop's remark is as true now as it was twenty years ago; if anything, the priests are more unblushing in their immorality. Their mistresses and children are received in all societies, and address their father as "papa" in public, as well as private. Priests' children are generally good-looking, I have noticed, and the belles of Panama are the daughters of a wealthy padre.†

* "Travels in Central America," by R. G. Dunlop, p. 347.

† It is not very probable that this work will fall into the hands of any friend of these young ladies—whom, it should be noted, I do not personally know; but if such a chance should befall, I pray him not to inform them how they have pointed my moral; though there is no harm in being a belle, that I know of, nor in being a priest's daughter.

Several veritable graveyards are known on Ometepec, and many more could no doubt be found in case of need: such spots are always fenced in with a line of heavy stones. But besides these fixed cemeteries, lonely graves are found at almost every step, and it is a literal fact that the inhabitants dig their pottery out of the ground. Now, in regard to these isolated burials, there are several curious facts. Every person of any class to whom the question may be put, will assure the antiquarian that quantities of gold are continually disinterred; and on the mainland just opposite stands the town of Rivas, filling the site of that old capital of which the cacique gave D'Avila twenty-five thousand pieces of eight in golden ornaments; and yet the little rattle we found near Juigalpa is the only piece of metal we could actually hear of, nor did those who told of treasure-troves profess to have personally seen them. In Costa Rica and Honduras, gold ornaments and idols are constantly found; but there also the ruins of ancient mines strike astonishment into the modern "prospecter." I speak of Nicaragua only, and in that country no such remains are

seen; nor, we are told, could the scanty washings of Segovia ever be very productive. My own opinion is that gold was the only metal with which the Indians were acquainted, and that the quantity in use must have been very small.* Mr. Squier engraves a copper mask found at Ometepec; but in the absence of further specimens, the antiquity of this curious relic must seem doubtful. In fact, contradictory as it may appear, this mask would be to me an argument for my own view. The skill needed to forge or cast such a work of art must surely have been exercised too largely to leave but a single specimen after three hundred years. It seems more probable that it came from the south. "I never found a trace except one," says Mr. Byam, "of any copper mine ever having been worked or even attempted; and the exception was a mere hole six feet deep, evidently of late date. The ancient race who lived in this country long before they were driven out by the Mexicans, who in turn succumbed to the Spaniards, have left no trace of copper workmanship, though they have of gold and silver; and in some of the districts

* *Vide* Chapter V., Vol. I.—Andagoya's testimony.

of Central America there are remains of rather extensive gold and silver mines, and one or two of cinnabar, ... so hard, that it is wonderful how much has been done without gunpowder, for there is not a single mark of the blast. They have been abandoned for ages, and it will be long, very long, ere they are worked once more."* I am perfectly well aware that my views about the gold idols, and so forth, may be eternally confuted by the histories of the conquest; but I put them forward notwithstanding, for our dreams of antique magnificence should be moderated by those reports which cannot lie. In their date it was obviously the interest of all persons connected with America to put forth flaming accounts, in order to draw emigration from Spain; and this was especially the case in Nicaragua.

The numbers of the Indians at that time may be guessed from the fact that half a million of them were shipped to Panama without exhausting this country. Blancos, Indios, mestizos, negroes, mulattoes, and Sambos do not now number

* Mr. Byam, p. 53.—The gold and silver mines referred to are in Honduras and Southern Costa Rica. Mr. Byam's history, however, is not quite correct.

two hundred and fifty thousand in all. The aborigines would seem to have lived much as their descendants do, but the warlike spirit for which they were famed has been quite crushed out of them; by what thorough, frantic, God-defying cruelty, let Europe recollect in pitying Spain. The caciques seem to have had little power by divine right, but considerable influence by the right of fist. All houses were built of cane and wood, but the dwellings of the wealthy seem to have been very large and comfortable. What is a savage? and which of these two shall so be called, the Spaniard or the Indian? The latter made his land to blossom like a garden; the former has restored it to the wilderness. The latter built his house of wood and cane, and the former, after three hundred years, is of opinion that he was wise in so doing. The latter lived in order and comfort, and if he went to war, it seems to have been quite in a friendly way. By this time he might have boasted a set and stately civilization, to last as long as the mountains or the sea, like the Quichés and the Mayas. Look at him now! Which was the savage, the Spaniard or the Indian?

Antiquities are most numerous and in best preservation on the south-western slope of Ometepec. Partly from shame and partly from a feeling of awe, the Indians are very jealous of allusion to the history or language of their fathers; but a tradition is still extant among them, the only one, in fact, which we could gather, that when the Spaniards threatened a descent upon the island, so great was the dread already felt from the reports of their cruelty, the Indians, each and all, hid themselves in large pots, and were buried in their back gardens. Now, although no one entertains, or can entertain, a greater regard for national tradition than myself, or can be more willing to reconcile slight discrepancies at the expense of probability, still it must be evident that the difficulties encircling a full belief in this story are too deep for evasion. But as regards concealment of property, this story seems likely enough; for of the deposits almost daily uncovered by persons in search of some basin or crock for the wants of their primitive housekeeping, many, it is quite clear, have no connection whatever with any burial. The Indians know at a glance, by the

position of the crocks, whether they may expect to find therein some mouldering bones of their ancestors, or whether, without scruple of conscience, the treasure may at once be turned to account. If the deposit be funereal, the earthenware is found piled up in a single heap; if otherwise, it is scattered about without order.

The ashes of the dead, with the bones of the skull, were placed in an urn of shoe shape; the beads of basalt or chalcedony, the celt, or the flakes of flint were placed among them; in the mouth of the urn were laid the basins of black earthenware, the larger overlaying the smaller; and over all lay bowls of whitish glaze, covered with odd markings, which closed the mouth. Some of these cinerary urns are of great size. We have met with them three feet one inch in length by twenty inches high. They are nearly always painted in streaks of scarlet and black, with an ornament of two or three snakes in relief upon the rounded end. At the back is frequently a grotesque mask or handle, attached with "slip," or some similarly adhesive material. More rarely the urn is bowl-like in form; of such I have seen two specimens, one of

which, used by the finder as a horse-trough, was two feet ten inches in height by two feet six inches diameter in the centre. It was painted in streaks of scarlet and black.

None of the inhabitants of Nicaragua appear to have taken any interest in hunting, further than their dinner went, nor do they at this time. Though deer abound throughout the country, and boar, puma, tiger, tapir, maniti, and other animals are all very numerous, those trophies of skill and daring so much valued by our ancestors —the boar's tusk, the deer's horn—are never found in Indian graves. Even the bones of animals are not common. The alligator is a frequent ornament of their pottery and statues, and I once found in the jungle a rude clay imitation of a stag; but the human face grotesquely distorted was the usual model of their artists. Glass does not seem to have been known to them, and their weapons were of wood or stone. Had they been acquainted with copper, that metal, so frequent in their country, must soon have superseded wood and stone for purposes of war.* The ore of Central America is curiously

* *Vide* Chapter V., Vol. I.

easy to work, and the "Cobre de Labradores," or workman's copper, which can be used for all purposes without tinning, may be smelted in a common blast furnace. This we find was done in Honduras and New Granada, but in Nicaragua no trace of such knowledge is shown by their graves. The Indians themselves also at this day are unanimous in ascribing to the Spaniards their first instruction in the use of metal.

The pottery of ancient Nicaragua—which is as far superior to the modern production as a Wedgwood vase to a flower-pot—was rarely "thrown" on a wheel, or oven-baked. The patterns and ornaments are of endless variety, but some few shapes are common. Of the bowl, numbered 2, we might have brought away fifty specimens, differing in size, but similar in their odd markings. The most usual diameter is ten inches, height, four inches and a quarter. All of these bowls *intended* to be of similar size are exactly equal. The clay is brown and very tough; a thick yellowish glaze covers it over, and the outside is painted with very odd markings in red and brownish black. All

these bowls are precisely alike in their paintings, which most undoubtedly had a significance of some sort. The interior is painted in rings, and the bottom bears a handsome circular ornament.

Another common shape was that of a jar, in jet-black clay, well glazed and polished. The most usual height was about four inches, and diameter five inches and a quarter. The clay was singularly light. A wavy ornament round the rim, alternated with lines, was simply engraved.

The commonest shape of all was a saucer set upon three legs, and indeed the American Indians, from Canada to Patagonia, were specially fond of the tripod for all uses. The size varied very much, from six to three inches in diameter, and from four to two inches in height. This vase was also of brown clay, very highly painted in red and brown. Like the bowl, its substance was quite hidden by a very thick coating of whitish-yellow material,* which can be chipped off with a knife. The legs were hollow, and had a hole on either side. The ornaments unquestionably were significant.

No. 3 shows the sepulchral urn which accom-

* I observe that the colour of this glaze has darkened considerably since I found it.

panies all deposits, whether funereal or not. The same form is constantly repeated in all sizes, with additional ornament. Sometimes it has two handles behind, sometimes one large loop at the toe; very frequently a grotesque mask is joined on at the back. It is black, or red, or brown, or rayed, or painted in masses. The ornaments at the toe are always present in some shape or arabesque, as snakes or human hands: sometimes they are two in number, and sometimes three.

These are the only shapes I noticed as being of constant recurrence, but several others I found in duplicate.

No. 1 is an exceedingly handsome tripod vase; brown clay, yellow-white glaze, crimson painting. The grotesque heads on the upper part of the legs are well drawn, well modelled, and cleverly coloured. One of them has a very ferocious expression, but the others show a sphinx-like wisdom. This is a very beautiful specimen: height five inches and three-quarters, diameter six inches.

Another unique specimen I found was a vase of black clay, standing on four feet, and orna-

mented with four snakes. The rim was engraved, and a mask formerly adorned either end. Height three inches and a quarter, length six inches, width five inches and a half.

Another was a vase of black clay, bearing a head, well drawn in the grotesque style, and encircled by two curious arms. Height three inches and a quarter, diameter four inches and a half.

I obtained also an antique whistle, wonderfully like our own. The ornaments were broken, but the woman from whom I got it said they were snakes.

The Indian potters sometimes exercised their skill in the most minute fabrications. As, for instance, a tiny little vase, one inch and a quarter high, in black clay.

Figure 4 in the plate is the leg of a tripod. It represents an alligator's head, painted in brown and crimson.

The other varieties of shape are endless, and I am not sure that I have made the best selection in these descriptions; but where all are so curious it is difficult to decide.

In regard to these crocks generally, I would remark that almost all of them were as fit for

ANCIENT POTTERY FROM NICARAGUA. (OMETEPEC AND ZAPATERO.)

I. Tripod. Height, 5¼ in.; dia., 6½ in. Buff earthenware. Ornaments and hieroglyphics in red.—Ometepec.
II. Bowl. Height, 2⅞ in.; dia. 7 in. Cream-coloured earthenware. Hieroglyphics in red.—Zapatero.
III. Small shoe-shaped urn, similar to those used as cinerary.—Ometepec.
IV. Foot of a tripod representing the head of an alligator. Buff, with red paintings.—Ometepec.

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use at the time of their discovery as when first buried at least three hundred years ago. A few have been broken in their voyage to the British Museum, but not one shows any sign of decay after resting so long under a damp tropical soil. Many of the larger vases are half an inch in thickness, and the paint seems to have sunk in, as if applied while the clay was still wet.

As might have been expected, the dwellers on the fertile slopes of Ometepec were a less warlike tribe than the mountaineers of Chontales, though neither seem to have been very fierce if likened to the old races of Europe. Weapons of great beauty are sometimes unearthed; though I only succeeded in getting a broken celt of basalt, and a quantity of flint flakes. Mr. Jebb was more fortunate during his stay; he found in a hut two beautiful little celts of granite, and a broad, thin axe of basalt. On Zapatero he obtained a celt of chipped flint, very rare in its shape, and, I believe, unique among American specimens. The regularity of its outline, and the smooth sharpness of its edge, make it unusually interesting. The ordinary form of celt is not unfrequently found throughout Nicaragua.

A very common ornament in the Ometepec graves is a string of beads, sometimes of chalcedony and sometimes of lava. The piercing of the latter is wonderful. Many of the beads are an inch in length, ringed all over, and pierced with a hole as fine as ordinary thread. The whole bead is not thicker than twine, and most brittle. Had we not seen like wonders before, we could never have deemed such fine work possible without tools of metal. The chalcedony beads are very much larger; they are handsomely rounded and polished, and the hole is carefully bored. Ten to fifteen formed a necklace or bracelet, from which we may conclude, either that they were only worn by children, or that feathers and other perishable ornaments were interspersed.

Mr. Squier's researches have proved that the ancient inhabitants of Ometepec were Mexicans, or at least spoke the Mexican language. The tradition is that they fled from their own country in consequence of unheard-of oppressions practised upon them by some unidentified nation, which had enslaved them. Another story would attribute their dispersion to a grievous famine.

Their language can scarcely be said to differ from the Aztec; its sole peculiarity, so far as is known, being the omission of the final "l" so frequent in Mexican words, and the substitution of an "e;" thus zapotl, a fruit, becomes zapote; mecatl, string, becomes mecate; metlatl, a stone for grinding maize, becomes metlate. It was among these people, or at least among their kindred on the isthmus of Rivas, that the conquerors first landed; and they were then noted for their peaceful disposition above the other races of the land. At present, however, a different character is given of them, and the Indians of Rivas and Ometepec are rather celebrated for a cold ferocity which has died out among the more martial people of the other provinces.

Day after day passed on Ometepec; and although busy with antiquities, I could not help feeling anxious about my friend, who should have rejoined me long since. A pleasant time it was; a time of work and sport and idleness, such as life should be. Oh, you dwellers in the streets of London, you who have the right to call yourselves bored, go out to a tropical island, and see the beauty of this earth! How it all comes

back to me on this dreary day of English October. Again in fancy I sit by my hut door, in the deep grey shadow of the orange trees. A carpet of purple-blossoming mimosa is at my feet, spangled with fallen fruit, and the greedy black wasps whiz past me to their meal. Through the twined creepers on the rocks, between palm stems, and over the flowering brushwood, glitters the golden lake in a changing haze. The hot blue sky is flecked with windy clouds, but we rest in burning calm under the guard of our hanging peak. Each leaf above my head throws a keen, still shadow, but through tiny gaps of foliage long rays quiver down, jewelled with hovering flies. Far off, deep in the thickest wood, the congos howl, and a faint echo of their thunder fitfully strikes the ear. So hot, so still is the noonday. With noiseless steps the barefoot girls glide past, carrying their load of water-gourds; a startled lizard rustles through the leaves; sleepily croaking, the parrots flutter overhead, in search of a thicker covert; the insects buzz and dart and hover. Here is more beauty than one can draw —and silence with it.

But at the end of a fortnight I resolved to run

across and see how things stood with Mr. Jebb. Accordingly, passage was taken for me on board a bongo, but on reaching the shore at the time appointed, a white sail was seen skimming over the lake far towards Virgin Bay. Such little humorisms are common among the Ometepec Indians, and after a few remarks, we hunted for another boat. A small "dug out" was about to sail, bearing a cargo of maize, and I took passage for myself and Mr. Campe. All my treasures were packed in the big cinerary urns, and when the maize, the antiques, and ourselves, *five grown men*, were on board, the little canoe was sunk to her gunwale. When she was rigged we did not like the look of things, for her boom was as long as the mast, and much heavier; but, nevertheless, we stood out boldly to double the promontory of Piedramola. Beyond the lee of the mountain, waves rose high and broke dangerously. The sky was speckled with driving balls of cirri, and the horizon showed palely clear all round, between level lines of cloud and water. It looked like a gale, we thought, but our canoe ran on blithely before a stern wind.

About a mile from shore we put about to double Piedramola, and our ponderous boom soon began to trip and catch among the chopping waves. In the broken and bubbling troughs the water was steely blue, for the offing of Ometepec is from fifty to a hundred fathoms deep. I sat balanced on a sack of maize a foot above the gunwale, watching the foamy crests that circled round, and admiring the wondrous ugliness of the alligators basking ashore. Here and there the dripping black fin of a shark pierced the dark surface, glittered diamond-like for an instant, then dived down beneath a breaking wave. Suddenly the wind changed four or five points, and a quivering shock nearly threw me from my seat. That screaming "Cara-a-jo!" of the steersman rang in our ears for hours after.

There are two moments in my life of which I seldom care to think, though, thank Heaven, they never take such a mean advantage as to haunt me while asleep. The scene of one is the deck of a mighty steamer in the Indian ocean. The moonlight sparkles on great waves, which roll solemnly up, swinging the vessel over until her bulwarks almost dip. In a wicker chair,

behind the empty pilot-house, sits a man asleep, with his legs stretched out along the broad arms. Eight bells have struck, and the deck is black and still save in the dim rays of the compass-light. Silently the great ship works on through the haze, rolling yard-arms under as she goes. A mightier wave swells up, a moontipt mountain of black water; the chair slides quick across the polished deck. With a wild shout, unheard by all, the sleeper wakes—to find himself poised upright above the deep, with his feet entangled in the bulwark netting.

The second scene is on the Lake of Nicaragua, when our steersman screamed so horribly. Deep down under the waves lay the end of our ponderous boom; the canoe was dragging on her side, and a clear flood of water poured smoothly in. I think I shall never again see a sharp black fin above the waves without a shuddering memory of that moment on the Lake of Nicaragua. Let us finish the pointless farce by bullet, or by tearing claws, ay, or by long disease, but not, if one be allowed a choice—not by the foul shark's jaws.

The scene, I suppose, lasted not a half second,

yet it was long enough to give one a valuable sensation. One blow from a keen machete brought down the canvas with a run, and we righted half full of water. With sail close reefed we put back for a lighter boom, and very little was said until my revolver began to touch up the alligators basking on Piedramola. Then under the lee of the island a pretty row broke out. "Carajo! It was your fault! Carrai! You steered like a he-mule. Todos los Santas, you were dreaming of that she-mule, Dolores, upon such a day as this. Carramba! You cannot make a knot—you have spoilt my rope." But we silenced the row and sent them into the jungle.

Presently a new boom was found, and in their anxiety to avoid heaviness they brought on board a stick ridiculously slender, with which we scudded off again. Further adventures were in plenty, but nothing more severe than to make us rather silent. Twice the helm* was

* It is rather curious, that while all savages are taking to rudder steering, the Europeans generally are adopting the oar or paddle. The fact is, that both have great advantages in different situations. We must have been swamped had we not steered with a rudder on this occasion; but a Carib or an Oriental would have carried through safely with a paddle.

unshipped by the waves, and we had to lie to and refix it. By the time La Virgen was reached in the afternoon, it blew such a whirlwind as I could not have believed possible on an expanse so broad. The seething water came in semicircles, and tugged at the canoe as if to rip her up. I think I realized the idea of "mountain waves" more thoroughly on Lake Nicaragua than ever I did in an ocean storm. Not, of course, that their size could be compared, but they towered so mightily overhead and shut us in so darkly. It was well we had a brave old Indian at the helm, and also that baling took up all our thoughts, or we might never have reached the shore. After a voyage of eight hours, as weary and trying as could be wished to test one's nerves, we made the pier at Virgin Bay, when the crowd who had been watching rushed into the arms of our dripping crew, to congratulate them on their escape. Decidedly I hold Captain Pim right in saying that a sailor of the sea had better cruise for a week on Lake Nicaragua before expressing contempt for the sailor of fresh water.

The first thing to do was to water the sandy

road to the Saint Charles Hotel, and there "take a drink." Then I saddled my little chesnut mule, and within a quarter of an hour she was trotting off to San Juan del Sur. The Transit Road from Virgen is a good piece of engineering, and its condition admirable. No trifling energy is needed to survey and lay out a road across the wood-blocked hills of Nicaragua. There are, I believe, between fifty and sixty bridges in a space of twelve miles. Many of them, it is true, are mere platforms of loose board, but a few arches there are of some span, and not a little labour to raise. The expense is comparatively very large, though every material needed is to be found within a hundred yards. Daily some mischance happens. Either a landslip blocks the road, or a great tree falls across, or the rains wash away the path, or, commonest of all, a flood carries off the bridges. The labourers and their negro overseers have no rest from picking and chopping and pounding.

Half way to San Juan is a large bar, kept by an American who remembers the palmy days of the Transit, when he, like every one else, was in a fair way to make his fortune. But Walker

seized the steamers—very justly, by the way—and the Costa Ricans came down and sacked and murdered; and though this old man escaped with life, his business was ruined. Is he much the worse for that? Instead of keeping a stifling store in New York, or pecking at life in a Cockney villa, he sits in the shadow of his orange grove—there is mysterious virtue in an orange grove, is there not, ye poets?—and drinks his own beer, and smokes his home-grown weed. If the passer-by be not rich enough to treat the host, why, the host treats the passer-by. After half an hour's cool chat, the one goes on down the broad white road, and the other sits under his orange trees in waiting for the next traveller. I can't see that he's so much to be pitied, that old bar-keeper on the Transit road.

San Juan del Sur, like Virgin Bay, is a mere collection of bars, sign-boarded as Dime House, Half-Dime House, according to the price of a "drink." Once a month it becomes an excited little place enough, when the passengers go through; but in a very few hours they all have gone their way, and the fighting and the drinking and the swearing are all over until next

month. Mr. Jebb saw one of these curious migrations. He says there were five or six fights always going on, between men in broad-brimmed hats, velvet waistcoats, and profuse watch-chains. The passengers were not in the least like the ideal generally suggested to us by the name "digger;" they seemed rather like swell-mobsmen after a stroke of luck.

Nearly all the year round the wind at San Juan del Sur blows seawards, and with such steadiness that a boat runs a very small chance of beating back if beyond the lee of the shore. While Mr. Jebb stayed, two men put out in perfectly calm weather; they went too far, and were unable to return. A large boat, well-manned, went after them, but neither one nor other ever again reached shore—unless upon the coast of China. All along this shore are little bays much like that of San Juan, and nearly as well suited for harbours as the one chosen. Deep caves abound in the wooded cliffs, but wild beasts are not very common. Snakes there are of notable magnitude, and a noble specimen of a python is hung above the door of the hotel. The only amusement or oc-

cupation of San Juan is to bathe, and to shoot sharks, which are in shoals. One night Mr. Jebb had a dream which came curiously true. He fancied that in going to bathe, at his usual place, he found a skeleton lying on the beach. Next morning he was greeted by a bleached and broken skull just in the spot where his dream had foretold.

On the following day I rode back to La Virgen, and in the afternoon strolled over to Rivas, which is only seven miles away. At the conquest this was the site of a great Indian town, governed by the Cacique Nicaragua, who finally gave a name to the whole country. Although this chief seems to have been a man of shrewdness, Gonzales d'Avila managed to draw gold from him to the value of 40,000*l.*, which he kindly repaid with a linen shirt, a silk dress, some holy water, and a pocket-comb. Apropos of this, Nicaragua asked why so few men coveted so much gold? To which, as we are told, d'Avila gave such prudent answers as satisfied him. Having overthrown the idols, set up a cross in the temple, and hung it with cotton cloths, D'Avila baptized nine thousand

Indians, and pronounced the country converted. On the road from Rivas to Dirioma—where now there is but a single hamlet—Peter Martyr says there were six villages, every one of which had two thousand houses, giving at least fifteen thousand souls in each by the modern average.

The neighbourhood of Rivas is like an immense garden, but unluckily its cultivation is only along the roadside. Cacao and maize are the chief productions of this district, and the path winds between fields and plantations for miles, without a break in the prickly hedges. In the town itself every house is ruined or newly-repaired, and whole streets are represented by a few shrub-grown mounds of shattered bricks. An ugly church on the plaza is now being rebuilt in a style more hideous than before, and the wealth of the wretched people is drained from their own necessities to deck the tasteless extravagance of the priesthood. At Rivas were the first and the last struggles of the filibusters. Every one interested in Central America,—and fortunately a great many who are not interested also,—knows that those disturbances which have never ceased since the Independence, were

chiefly caused by the dissensions of two political parties, called Serviles and Liberals. The distinction between the two is now so fine, that the terms are frequently changed into Granadinos and Leonese respectively, from the cities most allied to their doctrines; but in early times party strife really took its rise in political differences and principles. The Serviles represented the wealth, and, to a great extent, the intelligence, or education—which, after all, is *not* the same thing—of the country. Their aim was to establish a monarchy, with an exclusive church, an Inquisition, a titled class, and slavery; and holding, as they did, the visible power of the land, it seemed at one time probable that these objects might be carried. But when the short struggle with Spain was over, a secession of the younger members, on whom reliance had most been placed, gave a power to the Republican party, against which the clergy and aristocrats found themselves helpless. Slavery was abolished, titles were done away with, toleration proclaimed, and the rights of man were declared to be the foundation of the Central American Federation. The Serviles called in Iturbide, the

new Emperor of Mexico, who annexed the five states to his young dominions. But not for long. Poor and ignorant and foolish as these people were, they had at times generous impulses too lofty, and a patriotism too noble, to bear with a mongrel monarchy, and a simultaneous rising drove out Mexicans and Serviles together. While the prizes were worth gaining these parties strove for them; the one held together by an ugly bond of wealth and pride and vengeful hopes, the other struggling nobly and triumphantly for freedom and manhood.

Yet it was this latter party which, after years of merciless warfare, after victory on victory, ever neutralized by the intrigue and bribery of the other side, first in its despair called in the dangerous aid of a foreign soldier.* At the Presidential Election of 1853 the rival candidates were Señors Castellon and Chamorro. Long before this the Serviles had lost all hope

* Don Fruto Chamorro indeed enlisted individual Americans, and even, it is said, imported some riflemen from California, whom he posted on the tower of La Merced Church; from which advantage the principal men of the other party were picked off whenever they came in range. The deadly aim of these Yankees gave them a reputation subsequently valuable to the filibusters.

of carrying out their early purposes, and a new generation of them had sprung up, which was rather a passive block to progress than an active enemy. This party had its head-quarters at Granada, while the still active democracy, animated with a faint memory of former hopes and aspirations, drew its chief support from the ruined capital, Leon. But the country was worn out with the ceaseless struggles of thirty years. The land was untilled, trade had fled, popular education was untried. To give an instance of the incredible havoc of the war, Leon, the capital, had forty thousand inhabitants at the Independence; thirty years after it could scarce count fifteen thousand.

In the election of 1853, Don Fruto Chamorro was victorious, and Castellon's party hastened to make their escape; for political hatreds are such that a candidate defeated must fly for his life. A decree of banishment followed Castellon to Honduras, but in the following year he made his way to Leon, where he raised the garrison, and proclaimed civil war. Chamorro shut himself in his own town of Granada, where Castellon besieged him for eight months without

effect. At this time Colonel Walker was raising a force in San Francisco for the "revolutionizing" of Sonora, and to him the disheartened Leonese turned for assistance.

"Walker was born in 1824. His father was a banker at Dundee, but emigrated to the United States in 1820. William Walker graduated successively in law and physic, but settled down as editor of a paper in New Orleans; thence he went to California in a similar capacity, and left that employment to become a leader of filibusters against Sonora. His object was to raise that magnificent district into an independent republic, but the time was not well chosen for the attempt, and he failed. Walker was a small, wiry man, height, five feet four inches, very light hair and thick moustache, no beard or whiskers, eyes prominent and large, of a singularly light grey colour; his manners were grave and taciturn, habits most temperate; highly ambitious, but careless of acquiring wealth; brave without being reckless, resolute, and determined, he proved himself a model leader for the desperate and lawless men with whom he had afterwards to

deal."* A strange and marvellous man, but one of a type not uncommon in the western states of America, where children are brought up in a world hundreds of years younger than our own, to be afterwards turned loose among the tape-bound civilizations in which they are anachronisms. A character not without most noble points; a mingling of the divers virtues belonging to savage and civilized life, with the bold vices of the former only.

They say it was a gay scene in San Francisco when Colonel Walker, the idol of the adventurous, opened his enlistment offices. All over the town were posted bills headed "Beauty and Booty!" and calling on the filibusters of Sonora and New Orleans to join their most brilliant leader. But the character of recruits was too severely examined to suit most of these heroes, and fifty-five only, the very cream of California, set sail under his command. When the war became desperate, this scrutiny was necessarily softened; but Walker, to the last, seems to have done his very best to keep bad characters from his reckless army. And not without some suc-

* Captain Bedford Pim's "Gate of the Pacific," p. 41.

cess. M. Frœbel, certainly no partial witness, observes, . . "There were about one hundred armed men on board, proceeding to join the army of William Walker in Nicaragua. With some of them I was personally acquainted, and I can say that, though reckless fellows, they had many good qualities, and were seriously convinced that they had engaged in a glorious and praiseworthy undertaking."

I am not about to give a history of the Filibuster War, which must be fresh in the memory of Englishmen interested in it, and little engaging to general readers. In the first fight at Rivas, the fifty-five Americans stood their ground against a thousand native troops under General Boscha, and inflicted fearful losses on the enemy before retreating. In the second battle, Walker attacked the town at the head of five hundred men, but was beaten off with loss; but the occupying force had suffered so severely in the encounter, that it evacuated the place, and the filibusters took possession. In his last desperate fight, Walker stood at bay here, and beat back the besiegers time after time, and week after week. But what the thousands of the enemy

could never have wrought, famine worked for them. And so poor Walker fled away, and schemed and struggled at New Orleans. And on the 25th of September, 1860, he was shot at Truxillo, dying like the hero he was, and calmly writing his hopeless protest for the future blush of our race :—

"I hereby protest before the civilized world, that when I surrendered to the captain of H.M.S. Icarus, that officer expressly received my sword and pistols, as well as the arms of Colonel Rundler; and the surrender was expressly, and in *so many words*, to him, as the representative of her Britannic Majesty.

"WILLIAM WALKER."

And the captain of H.M.S. Icarus gave him up to the savage Hondurans!

After the strife of thirty years, Rivas is little better than a heap of ruins. I am hoping and trying to paint the downfall of Nicaragua without exaggeration, but I have no words for the squalid misery of its smaller towns. Everywhere are mounds which tell of fallen buildings; great porches and pillars of stone yet stand, all

solitary, by the roadside, bearing aloft a waving world of tender foliage. In the deep crevices wrought by time or war, brown iguanas puff their throats, and stare at the passer-by. In tangled shrubberies, marking the line of former streets, vultures and half-wild pigs fight and scream for carrion. The plaza itself is foul and mean, and dreary beyond all words of mine. The mud-built church in ruins, and the efforts of rebuilding shown here and there by a pile of adobes,* add the last detail to the desolation of the scene. Thirty years ago Rivas had twenty-two thousand souls; ten years ago it had twelve thousand; now it has seven thousand.

But in this dreary bat-haunted ruin we were greeted with stirring news from Granada. On the night of February 10 the earthquakes came again with redoubled force; walls cracked, stones fell, and many houses were half unroofed. Eighty distinct shocks took place between nine o'clock at night and four o'clock on the following afternoon. One house only had yet fallen, but nearly

* Adobes are large sun-dried bricks of straw and mud. They are very cheap and useful, but always dirty in look, and much haunted by snakes and vermin. There cannot be anything striking about adobe ruins.

all showed great gaps and fissures in their walls. A deep crevasse had opened in the plaza, from which hurtful gases came up. Brave men were wild with fear and helplessness, hundreds were already raving mad. A frantic crowd besieged the confession-boxes night and day, and mass never ceased at the altars. From every side reports poured in of cities overwhelmed, of rivers bursting their banks, of flames flickering at night over the lake and in the sky. It was with a strange look of awe that the silent crowd, which had gathered round us while we listened, stared up at Ometepec, whose sunny peak hung almost above our heads. So grand and mysterious it seemed, that circle of blue cones, the emblem of Nicaragua, which held our lives in their tortured breasts; silent and solemn as the unbending fates amidst the helpless panic of men's minds.

Such were the stories they told us at Rivas, and our plans were altered thereby. I hastened to San Juan del Sur to tell Mr. Jebb, looked up a Mr. Shipley for a guide, packed up my antiquities for the steamer, and next afternoon, February 18th, started on my mule for Granada.

CHAPTER III.

A long ride—Fugitives—Scenes of excitement—Story of a Jew—Of an old lady—Of a young lady—Of a filibuster—Spirited conduct of the government—Special Providences—Strange rumours—Story of a "sportsman"—Masaya again—Disturbances—Highwaymen—Advice to travellers—Murderers—"Beautiful Nindiri!"—Midnight rides—Managua—An enthusiastic congress—Outbreak of Cosiquina—Fearful scenes—Crater lake—Dread Nihapa—Rock paintings—Don Drunken Deputy—Loud threats—A modern free-lance—A midnight ride through a burning forest—Nicaraguan inn—Nicaraguan out—Nagarote—Calling—Pueblo Nuevo—A long night ride—Alarums and Excursions—Leon—Mad horrors—Cathedral—Leonese belles—Story of a mule, a snake, an ocelot, and an antiquarian—Strange death of Mr. F——— —A black forest—Realejo.

My ride to Granada was void of noteworthy incident. At dawn of day we started again from Rivas, and trotted gaily to our breakfast twenty miles off. Verdant fields of maize, tobacco, yucca, and cacao stretched a couple of hundred yards on either side the road; and Indian huts, bowered in orange groves, dotted the fertile land. Beyond this strip of cultivation lay the jungle and the

mountains. After noon we started again, fording a shallow river,—in which, as Mr. Shipley told me, were many Indian relics found,—and entered a scanty forest growing on hard black soil. Till night we rode through the trees towards Dirioma. The hot sun glinted on us through the foliage, flaming macaws screamed and fought above our heads, wild bulls fixed us for a moment with their beautiful soft eyes, then crashed headlong through the resounding brush. The sun sank lower; congos howled and cried at us; fat armadillos leapt across the path with long tails upraised and a scornful kick of their hind legs. Then the evening drew on; green and scarlet parrots flapped croaking above the tree-tops; white-faced monkeys fled clashing before us; the prying jays, tired of following, fluttered away to their roosts. Bats began to swoop about the creeping shadows, and beetles to whiz singing past. Darker it grew, and darker; a sheeted mist lay dim upon the tree-tops, and dank odours rose from the steaming ground. But our careful mules crept on over an unseen path, snorting occasionally, as their keen scent warned them of some prowling beast; and at

length we reached a large hut, with no worse chances than a bruise or two about the knees.

At dawn we were again in the saddle, and trotting on, over a six-inch forest-track, towards Granada. On nearing the town, about noon, we met numerous parties hastening from the danger. First came rough-looking servants carrying children before them on the saddle; then mules laden with food, hammocks, and valuables; last, the father of the household, with his wife upon a pillion. Quite picturesque they looked, these family cavalcades, especially the poorer parties; they reminded one of the Flight into Egypt, and also of Goldsmith's Deserted Village. On the roadside beyond Dirioma stands a massive idol, said to have been brought from Zapatero. It is of red granite, and not a little awful in style; but Mr. Squier has already published a description, and I shall have something to say hereafter about such antiquities. About breakfast-time we reached the city and hastened to the hotel.

A man brought up in a peaceful country, where stirring incident is rare, will always form unreasoning notions of the excitement into which an impending catastrophe can throw a people.

My own ideas had become shaped by experience; but after the stories we had heard, and the proofs of danger we had seen only a few moments before in the crowd of fugitives, it did seem strange to find Granada so still, and outwardly so calm. A few groups stood at the street corners staring at clouded Mombacho, and moving restlessly about; but through the open doors we could see the progress of ordinary business, buying and selling, combing of hair, and cooking of dinners. It seemed odd, somehow, and yet after all, as these people were kept in the city by some weighty cause, they *must* eat, and they had *better* comb their hair. What could be done? The churches were crammed, we could see, and black-robed women, with their faces shrouded, glided hurriedly from street to street. One wise fellow I noted, who was busily renailing the tiles upon his house, though few were yet capable of so much heroism. But when we reached the plaza, signs of the danger were thick enough. Workmen were busily thatching a great shed, under which stood the high altar of La Merced Church, and the holy pictures were piled against the supporting posts in picturesque confusion.

Vases and dishes, and mugs and flagons, of gilt or plated metal, were strewn all round, and half a dozen priests in full robe stalked about the building, keeping an awfully sharp eye upon all worshippers. Around this holy shed were dozens of "ramadas," or leafy huts, in which the people slept at night; and "high jinks" might have been played in nearly every house of the city, if the population had not been too frightened for mischief.

At the hotel I found Mr. S——, an English officer, whom we already knew. After hearing the report of Mons. Mestayer, I surveyed with much interest a yawning fissure in the wall over my bed-head. Then we sallied out in search of excitement. Our first visit was to an amiable money-changer, who is said to have solved that notable problem,—to make a fortune in Nicaragua; more wonderful still, he is said to have kept the fortune when made. He greeted us greedily in his innocent English. "Eh, but I tell you! Awful it's been after you been way! Shake, shake, shake! My house has been down; and my servant gal *she's* had a child! I wouldn't go through such three days again, not

for all I'm worth! No, sir! And it's coming on back, you should know. I've had a place put for myself, and I go there as soon as store's shut. Come and look at it!" He took us into a back store, solidly built of adobes, three feet thick, and proudly pointed to an iron bedstead, the head of which lay under a ponderous archway. Beside it was a pitcher of water and two or three loaves. "Now gentlemen, you should see! When the trèmblor come this arch won't fall; I sit there with my bread and my water, and I wait till they dig me out. Yes, sir! I'm all right." We pointed out that his legs must be smashed, and tried to show how he would stifle in the dense dust; but his faith was fixed upon a rock. We asked why he did not go away with his wife. "Eh! Go away? No, sir! There's thirty thousand dollars in this store, and I don't go. If the house falls, I can't help it; but I don't go! No, sir!" How his Jewish eyes twinkled as he spoke! The house was indeed in a bad way, stout though it were. The walls were cracked from top to bottom, and hundreds of tiles had fallen. "Eh? How I wish you'd been here, Mr. Boyle! Three days! Shake! It

was awful! *Gentlemen! you might make a three-volume novel out of my feelings those three days!* Thirty thousand dollars! Yes, sir!"* This romantic conceit was shot after us as we left.

At another house we found an old filibuster, who, though little used to fear, was so unnerved by the frequency of the shocks, that he dashed out of doors, and nearly broke his neck across a clothes-line. It was luckily slack, or he must have died on the spot. For some hours he was senseless, and a broad crimson line round his throat still showed the narrowness of his escape.

Some very funny stories we heard. When the sacred objects were hurriedly brought out of La Merced Church, and thrown under the shed, an old lady of well-known family grovelled before a painting of the Virgin, and bemoaned her sins in a manner so comic, that two by-standers — trembling though they were with fear and superstition—could not withhold their laughter. The old lady danced, and wriggled,

* I never on the stage heard the correct pronunciation of that droll Yankee "Yes, sir," which foreigners so soon pick up in the States. An immense emphasis is laid upon the "yes," and the "sir" falls in behind as if of very little worth, and, in fact, uttered under protest by a free citizen.

and sang, and cried, until these "ladinos" forgot their panic, and mocked her to her face. Frantic with rage and hysterics, she snatched up the object of her worship, and knocked one of them down with the heavy frame. The other fled into the open, howling with laughter, and she, tucking up her decorous garment, pursued him until both fell over a tent-peg. He was quite helpless in convulsions, and she belaboured him with the picture until it was taken from her; after which she sat on her enemy's stomach and had a fit. Another individual was wakened by the first shocks, and being clothed in the only covering which can never be put off, wrenched a netted hammock from its hooks, and rushed about the plaza arrayed in this breezy costume.

In the midst of the excitement the cheerful government of Managua, being far out of danger, issued an edict that no citizen should be abroad after eight at night without a special permit. This added much to the liveliness of the situation; but it was the earthquakes shattered the revolution, not the government edicts. What a proud moment must it have been for Don Tomas

Martinez, Director Supremo of Nicaragua, when he noted that the hidden powers of nature were exerted to keep him in office! In England, you know, such efforts are constantly made on behalf of certain favoured nations or eminent individuals, and we call them special providences; but it's absurd to talk of such things in reference to Nicaragua.

Some of the stories told in Rivas we of course had not believed at the time, but the greater part were true enough. It is a positive fact that eighty shocks of earthquake were felt between Sunday night and Monday afternoon, and it is also true that some persons lost their senses in fear. But who could wonder if the whole city had gone mad? Of all earthly perils, there is none which bewilders the mind like a volcanic convulsion. A feeling of utter helplessness dizzies one; the nerves become crazy with the watching and waiting. After a while the brain is affected; a frantic impatience for the end, whatever it may be, takes a tearing hold upon the mind; an hysterical frenzy hunts one wildly about the streets.

Rumours of every kind were floating round;

many, barely doubted now, would have been greeted with shouts of laughter in cooler times. There was a story going round about a landing of filibusters at Greytown, under the hero Henningsen, which was strangely absurd and circumstantial. Cities were cruelly overwhelmed at every point of the compass, but poor Caraccas bore the general brunt. Libertad, in San Salvador, was ruthlessly buried, and burnt, and smothered, two or three times each day; and though our informants were shrewd fellows enough, it struck them in quite a new light when we pointed out that the news could not possibly reach Granada under a month hence, even if it were true. So shaken were men's minds for a week after the convulsions.

Now these earthquakes, except three of the most severe, were confined to the close neighbourhood of Granada—so close, indeed, that the villages beyond a radius of three leagues felt nothing of them. From Rivas to Dirioma we ourselves had carried the news of danger; and the Indians of the latter place, only five leagues away, were first warned by the rush of fugitives from the capital. Though Mombacho unques-

tionably smoked, and possibly flamed at night. yet that volcano could scarcely be an agent, seeing that the shocks were not felt at its foot. The people, indeed, traced thither the current of convulsion, but I doubt the possibility of judging direction among houses; on the mountain it may easily be done. We plainly heard the cry of the people passing from the suburbs to the centre; but to my ear those lightning-quick currents of voice rose sometimes from one point, sometimes from another. It was strange how all animals could foretell the coming shock. I noted that the pigs raced violently about, screaming, a few seconds before each shiver; and every one told us that tame monkeys gave five minutes' warning to their masters. One large congo, in a house opposite the hotel, was studied day and night by anxious crowds. During the pauses he was very violent and noisy, tearing at his chain and foaming with fear about ten minutes before each shock; but gradually he calmed down helplessly, and, five minutes before the tremblor, clasped his arms over his head and sat down, convulsively shivering.

There are two round green hillocks between Granada and Dirioma, which, for all their innocent seeming, are likely to work more ill to the city than the great idle giant by the lake shore. The Indians who pass them daily assert that they grow visibly in height; and upon a point of mere keen-sightedness I should be led to place very great faith in native witnesses. Was it worth while for those young Titans so to frighten the little people of Granada? Yet perhaps, in frightening these, they somehow benefited the not despicable remainder of the human race. It is also possible that those grassy little hills pay small attention either to Granada or to the human race. They do their mighty work, and they know not why or how. So possibly do we; yet, for a time or two, one would like to change man's paltry pottering for the lonely might, the god-like will of a young volcano.

Certainly no remarkable talent is needed to make an average book of travels, yet it seems to me that this writing has one great difficulty from which fiction and history are free—I mean

the difficulty of avoiding personalities. It seems so barbarous to grasp an innocent man by the hand, to live familiarly with him, to take him in the twilight when his heart is opened, to ride with him under festoons of flowers, in a red haze of sunset, to press the confidential cigar, to hand across the gossiping brandy, and then to stick a pin through his mind, and deliver a lecture upon its structure. No critic, I am quite sure, can think less of these fragmentary jottings than I do myself; but really (this for the knowledge of friends) there are a few atrocities of which I am *not* capable, and one is to bait with human flesh for human fish.

Nevertheless there are occasions for personality which cannot be resisted, and one such occurred at this time. It is well known that in the United States professional gamblers, called "Sportsmen," live and flourish like bay trees, only not so green. These sportsmen — very worthy fellows in their way, so far as I have known them—ostensibly live upon their wits; but they are so different from the parallel class in Europe as to be worthy some note. Once upon a time two Englishmen and one Canadian,

being thrown together by the chances of travel, met with one of these characters, and much valuable knowledge did they gain from him during the week they were in company. Though only twenty-three years of age, he had already made his fortune, and was leaving business—a fact which possibly made him more open than he might otherwise have been; but such men never attempt concealment in America. There, in fact, the profession of a gambler is highly considered, as it was with us in the days of Casanova; but the games are scarcely as fairly played as is reported of those strange times. This sportsman, whom we will call A——, "corrected fortune" without a blush, and was quite willing to proclaim the fact from the housetops. "It's my business," he said, "and a good one it is. I risk my whole fortune, while you only play for as much as you don't mind losing. The gallery assists the amateur—it always will, if not by words, or openly, at least by those glances which a sharp fellow can catch—while I, professionally, must stand alone against twenty. *I could not win* unless I had my counterbalances. You don't see why I should win? Why, sir, it's my business,

and I live by it, just as you may live by your bank, or by the grace of G——, or any other line. I must make my money, and I have made it, and I'm going back to Europe to buy my uncle's old farm, where I was born, and I shall be one of the richest men in ——. Sporting is a business like any other, you know, only it's better than most when the right boy goes in. Could I have made and lost half-a-dozen fortunes, at my years, in any other profession? Conscience? Of course I've had an ugly 'muss' or two, but they did not come by my fault. What lawyer or doctor has not heard unpleasant things said of him? And, mind you, we're picked men in our business. I've played many a game on the old Transit steamers, with the bowies stuck upright in the board before every man. Yes, sir! And pretty free they are to use them, carrai! I dare say you two are tallish boys on your own line, and Jerry, there, he knows the price of log timber and skunk-skins; but *I* would not give you a dollar to table up in sporting. A sportsman must be born to it, and brought up to it, and he musn't like it. If he takes to playing for the sake of

play, he's gone Tombs-way. I never cared to sport my plunder unless it was for business; and so now, you see, I'm taking back to Europe fifty thousand dollars in cash, and property in New York and San Francisco and San Juan. It don't do to keep a bank, in the long run. When I first punted in New York I found out how to break 'em at faro, and there's too many know the trick now. I made pretty well, though, while I kept my house open in San Francisco; but I lost all that money smartly, and now I let the house to a virtuous cuss, with sixteen maidenly daughters. If my tenants saw in a vision the gay old games that have gone on in their 'salyunes' they'd 'scrimmy' up pretty tight of a night.

"Ruining people? H—— and h——! It ain't no business of mine. A fellow comes up to me. 'How are you, A——, my boy?' says he. 'I've got a thousand dollars of my plunder here, and I'll see you for that 'ere sum, at poker *or* at cut-throat euchre. Here's a friend or two will see this here sport through, and I guess the winner can stand a drink round out of it.' The fellow comes to me like that, with his pistol on his hip,

and his friends get round us, and we play. I generally win, of course, but I'm playing my life as well as my cards. What is it to do with me how he got the plunder, or whether he's children, or a granddam? I don't ask any man to play; they all come to me. Why, you yourselves heard those cursed young fools last night challenging me. You saw I could scarcely get rid of them, and I've promised to take a hand at poker to-night. You can't say *I* ruined them, if they every one go back and hang themselves to their hammock-hooks. And, h——! I don't care whether they're ruined or not. Have ye any brandy? I'll tell you a story."

Good stories they were, too, told with a quiet, good-natured cynicism very characteristic. Could anything on earth have startled that man? I think not, for he was quite as capable of benevolence as of crime, and of the two would have much preferred the former, like the rest of us. Not the least profitable evenings of their life were spent by those three Englishmen in listening to the strange history of an American sportsman. Joy be with him wherever he

wander, in his northern home, or under the palm trees of San Francisco! He never won a dollar of theirs; and all three parted from him with a hearty shake of the hand, and a broader knowledge of human nature in their hearts.

But one more note has to be made before the mind of this specimen can be properly classified. One pleasant evening the Englishmen were seated in his room, playing a cheery game at poker, for stakes too small to excite any one, and A—— lost a few dollars amidst general chaff. Presently enters a native gentleman, also staying in the hotel; and after looking on a moment, he requests permission to take a hand. "Certainly, certainly," cries A——, with a sudden keenness in his eyes. The victim sits down, while the Englishmen exchange glances comically puzzled. The game proceeds slowly, three of the guests anxious to get away, but unwilling gratuitously to make a dangerous quarrel. Presently the deal comes to A——, and with a Yankee accent, he cries out, "Wal! This is the dryest party ever I see. 'Say! Shall we take a drink?" And carrying the cards in his hand,

he gets up to reach the brandy bottle. "Thunder! the water-jug is as dry as Pike County, Māssoorah!" He runs away, carrying the cards, to the well outside, and in a moment returns with a full jug. After filling the glasses he begins to deal; and so cleverly is the trick played, that the Englishmen, though two certainly think themselves "generally aware of things," pass it by without suspicion. When the cards are dealt, one hand only is thrown up. A—— acts hesitation admirably; he looks at the cards, at the stakes, he rubs his chin, he half laughs—his game is quite pleasant to watch. At length he says, "Well, I'll play." "Five dollars up," says the wretched native. "Five dollars better," cries A——, while the other two throw up their cards. "Ten dollars better," says one. "Ten again," cries the other. "Five better!" "H——! I go the pile," shouts A——, pouring out a bag of twenty-dollar pieces. The native looks very glum, but his heart and his hand are good. So he calls his servant to fetch the money-bag. Alas! it only contains one hundred and forty dollars, and the last stake is, therefore, the valid one. The native

shows his hand—three kings; A —— shows his hand—four aces. The Englishmen suddenly crush through the doorway, and run each to his room, with a sound of choking.

But in a few moments A—— made his appearance, wild with rage. He accused the others of cheating him out of one hundred and forty dollars. "That money was *mine*. I should have taken every cent next hand. Then you running off frightened the fool away. Blank! blank! blank! The money was *mine*, and you cusses have cheated me out of it, just as if you had picked my pocket." It became necessary to take the thing up seriously, but he never could comprehend why gentlemen should not stand by and see a "Greaser" robbed of his money. "Do you mean to say it was all chance, Mr. A——?" "No, of course I don't. I packed the cards myself; but what has that to do with it?" His eyes were just as innocent as were Adam's in Paradise; and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil did not grow about the spot where he was reared.

Will it be believed that the wretched native wished to renew the game singly next morning?

Our worthy acquaintance, Mr. A——, did not know he was leaving so soon, or the match would not have been refused.*

One night I remember we were sitting in the moonlight outside the hotel door, when a gentleman came racing up, to ask one of us to second his challenge to the Governor of the town, who had insulted him grievously. No native, he said, would dare to carry the cartel, and he appealed to foreign honour. The situation might have been embarrassing had the gentleman not been palpably drunk; but Mr. S—— and I told him he was not in a fit state to ask such a courtesy from strangers. The Canadian, however, who seemed to know the man, agreed to bear his message, and they went off together. Presently Mr. F—— returned laughing. He said that our warlike acquaintance, who put such faith in English chivalry, had accompanied him to the Governor's apartment in the barracks, and, against all laws of

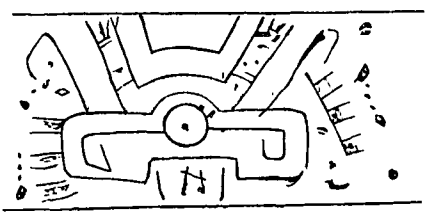
* "A picture of slang life in very doubtful taste, which the author should be ashamed of publishing. Most *gentlemen* would have knocked down the sharper instantly, or at least would have broken off their association with him."—Comment by a high-principled gentleman, who has never stood fire nor seen a Californian sportsman. Besides, the man was excessively amusing, and I may meet him any day in English society, richly whitewashed.

the duello, proceeded to give his challenge by word of mouth. The Governor, I believe a most respectable and obliging fellow, snatched a rifle from the sentry, and split his foe's head open with the butt. Mr. F—— might have fared the same, for the governor was furious, only that some officers present recognized him. The challenger, who had been educated at Stoneyhurst, where, as usual, he had learned *French*, was carried off to bed, and we heard no more of him.

When I had been a week in Granada Mr. Jebb turned up, much to the relief of my mind. His passage up the lake had been even more stormy than my own, and the canoe was forced to put in successively at Ometepec, Zapatero, and "the Thousand Isles." On the former island he succeeded in purchasing several pieces of pottery which had escaped my researches; among others, a very large basin of polished brown earthenware, which we called the punch-bowl, from its shape. On Zapatero he obtained a few vessels, chiefly shattered, of a character somewhat different to that of Ometepec. In shape and spirit the productions of either island

were more or less alike, but the size and ornamentation of the Zapatero specimens showed considerable originality. If I be right in believing the strange marks and figures on the earthenware, identical on each vessel of similar size and shape, to be true hieroglyphs—that is, to have some significance which could be translated into words—the genius of the Zapaterans would seem to have differed from that of the Niquiran people of Ometepec. Nothing was more common in a household of England, fifty years ago, than a cup or platter bearing some moral precept, as, for instance, "Waste not, want not;" "Do to others," &c.; and we may conceive that the New Zealander of the millennium would be fully as much puzzled with these unknown characters, alike on many specimens, as were we before the strange devices of Nicaraguan pottery. But that intelligent observer, noticing the absence of beauty or intricacy in the letters,—hieroglyphs he might call them,—would naturally conclude that they were not intended for adornment alone; and finding them, in whole or part, throughout a district, he might reasonably conclude that they had an unknown

significance, as did we in regard to those identical ornaments we found on every specimen of Ometepec earthenware. Each vessel had its appropriate motto (?); bowls, their odd figures of manikins, with twisted arms and curious arrangement of dots and lines; jars, their engraved rims adorned with strokes, upright,

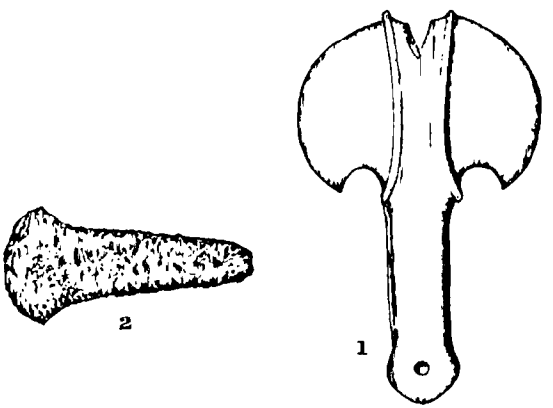


HIEROGLYPHIC ON A BOWL FROM SOUTHERN CHONTALES.
Bowl 5¼ in. diameter, 2¼ in. high; colour, buff.

oblique, and horizontal; richer vessels, their painted devices of no apparent significance. This was also the case in those few specimens Mr. Jebb obtained in Zapatero, but, as I have said, the character of their mottoes was somewhat different. Above is engraved a hieroglyph from a broken bowl, repeated in four sections of its circumference. If the late discovery of M. l'Abbé de Bourbourg be confirmed

by investigation, we may hope at no long date to comprehend the meaning—if meaning they have—of these strange figures.

Mr. Jebb also obtained from Zapatero several celts of basalt, much like the specimens current



1. Double-bladed Axe, from Chontales, apparently of Volcanic Stone. Length, 12¼ in.; width, 7¾ in.
2. Flint Axe, from Zapatero, Nicaragua. Length, 6 in.

in Europe. It has, indeed, been often remarked how curiously the instruments of early man resemble each other over the whole world, and these weapons of ancient Nicaragua go to strengthen that observation. But two of the implements he obtained were very much more interesting. The one was a broad, flat axe of

basalt, six inches in length by three to four in breadth; its thickness was the same throughout, never reaching a deeper measure than one-third of an inch. The other was a flint axe, engraved on the opposite page, of a shape rare in Europe, and, I believe, not found hitherto in America. The double-bladed weapon figured beside it was found in a Chontal grave. It probably belonged to a great warrior of that rude time. This latter is in the British Museum; the others mentioned we have given to the Blackmore Collection at Salisbury.

On the 27th of February we bade Granada a last farewell. The roads had of late become very unsafe, as is usual when revolutions are impending. One afternoon Dr. Flint advanced one hundred dollars to a Leonese Indian; that same night the man was stopped near Masaya and robbed; no mistake at all about it, for they broke his leg. The day before we set forth a poor fellow was cut to pieces on the same road. Such chances are never very rare in Nicaragua, but a notable increase takes place before political tumults. I suppose both parties like to "get their hands in" for the nobler spoil soon to be

attempted. With the paltry force at its disposal, the government can do little police duty, and the people are too apathetic to take the case in their own hands. Our agents at Granada warned us to reload our arms, for, said they, your departure is well known, and this office has been watched for some days, as we have reason to believe. Our baggage was piled on a bullock cart, under the charge of a tall, firm-looking Indian, and, tedious though such riding was, we determined not to outstrip his pace. Thus our moonlight journey to Masaya was made to the deafening music of Nicaraguan cart-wheels.

Half way between the towns is a narrow gorge, black as a pit's mouth. As we neared this spot a loud voice suddenly challenged the guide, who stopped short. A few words that passed were understood neither by Sammy nor by us; and then Joachim said all was right, and moved on. Of course our revolvers were out long since in readiness for the row. Suddenly three men, with long naked machetes in their hands, glided out from the blackness, and passed by. We sat still in our saddles while they strode past, their shining eyes stealthily

fixed upon the cold blue barrels. No words were exchanged, but the moonlight gleamed whitely on those long machetes, and on the hammers of our pistols, speaking plainly enough for us. It was rather picturesque I thought, and the attitudes were not a little striking. When we had watched these fellows past our cart, we wished them a bantering "adios," and rode on. The guide felt sure, and so did we, that they were not looking for us, whatever might be their business.

The word in Nicaragua, under such circumstances is—shoot! In that dense undergrowth bordering the road in most parts, a hundred brigands may be hidden, and at any risk it must be shown you carry firearms. But powder and ball are dear, and men dislike wasting their supply. Consequently they take a snapping aim, and so a good many accidents occur. There is little of the old highway chivalry among these blackguards. One stands in the thick blackness on either side the road, and the traveller's first warning is generally the frosty gleam on their machetes as they slice down at his thighs. As to "shooting," I remember the

experience given me by an old miner one day, when the talk had turned upon those "free fights" so common in the western and southern states. "If a 'muss' comes out at the bar," said he, "while you might be Nevada way or up the Prieto, you'd best lie by a bit and drink gin. *Then* if it don't stop—shoot! That's our way." This idea is really acted on to a breadth we could little fancy in England.

About ten o'clock we reached Masaya, and rode to the hotel I had formerly visited. Don Ingenio was just as handsome and as picturesque as ever, and nursing his pretty baby, as usual. Throat-full he was of awful massacres and fresh gor-r-e. Within the last fortnight a band of twenty-four mestizos had gone through the whole Newgate Calendar, and two of them had been recognized that afternoon strolling BLOOD-STAINED about the streets. Next morning we rode down to the playa, or lake, and watched the Indians beating dye out of *wild* indigo. I have already described the beauty of Masaya Lake and the lively scene on its shore. In the afternoon we trotted off to see the far-famed volcano, leaving orders with the cart-man to press on for Mana-

gua, and wait for us there. But at Nindiri the alcalde himself told us a woful story; how he was knocked off his mule on that very road two days before, grievously ill-treated, and robbed of his money. Justly alarmed at this report, we hurried back to Masaya in time to stop the cart, and in the evening we set forth again to ride till dawn through the forest.

But how unutterably lovely were the scenes we passed through on that weary night march! Other travellers have raved about the sunny beauties of Nindiri, but we were the first to ride through its broad lanes by moonlight, and to swear before the world that Eden does still exist upon this earth. Good faith! our generation is little given to enthusiasm, but when at the opening of the village, our guide, a dull mestizo, swept his arm lovingly round, and whispered, "Mira, Señores!" I—this is my confession—felt afraid to trust my voice, for dread of that "divine despair" which Tennyson has named for us. What fairy tongue could tell of that still loveliness beyond all dreams of enchantment? Oh! I have read descriptions of scenery east and west, south and north, at every point of the compass; I have

read the descriptions, and I have seen the scenes. They are nought. From henceforward I put my faith in Nindiri alone, ay, and in Mr. Squier, for he was her first prophet.

One cannot inventory Paradise. In my memory stand groups of dusky, deep-shadowed huts, pierced with red gleams of firelight, and overhung with sheets of blossom. Even yet our hearts can feel the softness of that enchanted foliage, and the thick perfume of its flowers. Tall palms stand out keen and black against a pale blue sky, bearing aloft their polished crowns, which glitter like a range of frozen fountains. Ay de mi! Where can I find words? As we look, a vision forms before us of what life might be in that unearthly village, and then —and then a pig runs across the moonlit road to remind us of what it is.

Yet keep I my faith in Nindiri, for I had not conceived, in the whole world together, such fairy loveliness as she displays.*

* To show how poetical the view of this spot can render even the American traveller, I copy Mr. Squier's "Apostrophe to Nindiri." 'Nindiri! How shall I describe thee, beautiful Nindiri! nestling beneath thy fragrant evergreen roof of tropical trees, entwining their branches above thy smooth avenues, and waving green domes over the simple dwellings of thy peaceful inhabitants! Thy musical

There were stately forest scenes also in that midnight ride, but I can name no earthly beauty on the same page with Nindiri. About one o'clock in the morning the moon set as we reached Savannah Grande. One or two doubtful characters glided across the road, but they hid themselves in the bush at our approach. We slung the hammocks under a shed, and slept comfortably till dawn; when, after a fight with a cow, and a victorious draught of milk, we pushed on for Managua, which we reached cheerily at breakfast time. Distance from Masaya nine leagues.

name, given thee long ages ago, perhaps when Rome was young, has lost nothing of its melody. Neenda, water, and diria, mountain, it still tells us, in an ancient and almost forgotten tongue, that thou slumberest now, as of yore, between the lake and the mountain. Amidst all the fairy scenes of quiet beauty which the eye of the traveller hath lingered upon, or the fancy hath limned with her rosy-hued pencil, none can compare with thee, beautiful Nindiri! chosen alike of the mountain fairies and forest dryads, of the sylphs of the lake and the naiads of the fountain! Nindiri! . . . Quiet, primitive Nindiri! seat of the ancient caciques, and their barbaric courts—even now, amidst the din of the crowded city, and the crush and conflict of struggling thousands, amidst grasping avarice and importunate penury, bold-fronted hypocrisy and heartless fashion, where virtue is modest and vice is brazen, where fire and water and the very lightnings of heaven are the slaves of human will, how turns the memory to thee, as to some sweet vision of the night, some dream! Arcadia, fancy born and half unreal!" And to this declamation I say Amen.

March 1*st*.—Owing to the hopeless rivalry between Granada and Leon, the seat of government was removed to this place some ten years ago. It is a little dirty town of six thousand inhabitants. The streets are unpaved, the dwellings are mere huts of cane, trade there is none at all. Of its ancient glory, Oviedo, while denouncing the tendency of the conquistadores to send home exaggerated reports of the country's prosperity, gives a hint in counting its former population at forty thousand souls, reduced within six years to ten thousand. It was after this devastation that Oviedo visited the town, and in view of such incredible cruelty, Las Casas' estimate of sixty thousand souls seems almost as probable as forty thousand. The town stands upon the shore of Managua Lake, at the south-eastern root of a long peninsula, which, being quite unexplored, is said by rumour to contain a vast city of stone, leagues in circumference.

Managua has a reputation for turbulence, noise, and immorality, which it justly has earned. Congress was sitting when we arrived; and well that it was, for many of the members were un-

able to stand. I have no wish to ridicule any republic, even the lowest, and no doubt there were many gentlemen of high character and honest intentions among the deputies staying with us at the hotel; indeed, there were several of our own friends, men worthy to vote in any assembly of the world; but the majority were noisy, drunken, senseless organs of the mob. Sleep was out of the question; drinking, and haranguing, and cheering went on from dawn to dawn. The crowd retired to swelter in its hammocks for an hour or two, then returned to its deputies to drink, and vomit, and drink again.

It is due to the Nicaraguans to say that certain political questions much excited the people at that time. The action of the President in yielding General Barrios to San Salvador had roused bitter feelings in many quarters, and hot discussions took place daily in the Congress. This gentleman, General Barrios, had been President in San Salvador, whence the people had expelled him. In August, 1865, he chartered an American schooner at Panama, and embarked to invade his country, after the simple system of this people. Foolishly putting into Realejo, Don

Enrique Palacios, the Guatemalan minister, who chanced to be there, heard of his design, and boldly boarded the vessel to arrest him. Now, although we may admire the courage of this *coup*, certainly no one can justify the conduct of this diplomatic gentleman, who had no right, spiritual or earthly, to touch an Ex-President of San Salvador in Nicaraguan waters. The most exalted feelings may have been, and probably were, his stimulant; but Don Quixote would have made a shocking bad ambassador as times go. Poor Palacios paid dearly for this chivalrous defence of his allies: within a fortnight he lay prostrate with an assassin's bullet through his jaw.

But, mean time, General Barrios was in the hands of Nicaragua, which did not well know what to do with him. At length, during the recess of Congress, the President handed him over to San Salvador, where he was instantly shot; which is the simple reverse of the simple system mentioned above. For this conduct the President and ministry were daily attacked in Congress. Don Joachim Chamorro made a Philippic, considered by those who heard it to

contrast favourably with the remains of the late Demosthenes, but in spite of the opposition the President's action was approved. The owners of the schooner at Panama also brought a case before the tribunals, on the ground of unjust seizure, but they lost it. The captain, however, was the great difficulty. He wouldn't escape at any price; or, at least, not at the price the government was willing to pay. He wandered about the country at his own expense, singing and making merry; but when tired of liberty he always came back to his prison, crying, "Throw me into the lowest dungeon! Load me with my fetters! I die innocent!" Whereupon he was taken to the Commandante's house and sat down to dinner. It was great fun to this jolly Yankee, and to all impartial spectators, but the President and his ministers did not catch the joke. The skipper swore he was a diplomatic difficulty, and, "Damme! he wasn't ashamed of the title!"

The "National Palace" is a wooden building upon the Plaza; not, perhaps, imposing to the scornful stranger, but an object of awe to the native mind. "Have you been to Managua?"

was a question frequently asked us; and on our negative answer, we were told, with open eyes and awestruck voice, "Ah! you *must* see the National Palace!" We saw it. For an ornamental barn it would not do ill.

March 2nd.—At dawn this morning we rode to visit some of the crater lakes common near the town. A couple of hundred yards from the houses takes one again into the forest; but the trees seem but a quarter grown, and the underwood is thin and scanty. Yet I cannot believe with Dr. Scherzer that this poverty of vegetation is to be referred to former cultivation. Oviedo asserts that the people of Managua had fallen to ten thousand souls within six years of the conquest, and they have probably recovered little at any period since. If fitly planted, trees should reach a fair height in three centuries. I do not venture to offer a theory myself in explanation, but I may perhaps mention a case somewhat parallel. On the 21st of January, 1835, the great volcano of Cosiquina, on the Gulf of Fonseca, burst into activity after the repose of centuries. That morning was sunny and cloudless, the low green islands in the bay softly rustled

their plumy crowns, the broad water rippled delicately. Upon a sudden the thunder of the deep awfully burst out. Men and beasts fell stunned with the roaring of that artillery; and while they lay, a cloud as black as death unrolled itself along the mountain. The water bounded in cataracts upon the beach; tall cliffs tottered and fell; and the deadly shroud swept swiftly, swiftly down, until a hundred and fifty miles of land and sea were wrapped in a darkness that could be felt. At Leon, one hundred miles away, candles and torches could not be seen at a few feet distance, and the loudest shouting was unheard in such a din. Wild beasts cowered in the streets, and more timid animals crept into the houses, alike uncaring and uncared for. Three days this awful fate hung on the earth. At Belize, five hundred miles off as the crow flies, the commanding officer called out his garrison, believing that the navies of the whole world were engaged outside. For two thousand miles in a radius the noise of Cosiquina's agony spread dismay and terror and confusion; for four thousand miles around the ashes fell thickly.

The loss of life by drowning and stifling and

accident was very great; but a consequence of more importance strangely followed. Nicaragua had hitherto been famous for the quantity and quality of her grasses, which grew alike in jungle and savannah; but the poisonous ashes of Cosiquina killed every species throughout the country, except a flaglike blade called "sacate." Their place was instantly filled with a tall, thick-leaved weed, and scarcely anywhere have the true grasses made an attempt to spring again. The loss to the country is incalculable, for sacate is not very well distributed, and no animal here will thrive well upon maize; indeed, they will not eat it except in the last resource. If, then, this single eruption could work such surprising change in the vegetation of the country, is it not reasonable to suspect a similar cause for the poverty of its forests ?*

The first lake we visited lay at the bottom of a rocky basin six or eight hundred feet deep. For what purpose I cannot conceive, a road was worn down the cliff side. On reaching the bottom we found the shore to be of bare pebbles,

* Some of the Nicaraguan forests are very thick and stately, as I have once or twice mentioned; but in general they are poor.

slimy with olive-coloured ooze, and the water was thick and clammy with green weed. On the barren margin, between the forest and the poisonous lake, lay spectral trees, ringed round with rusty watermarks. All lay dead and white, half in the lake and half on shore: from the naked branches wisps of withered weed hung down, stilly and rotting in that windless basin. Cliff over cliff was heaped up round the green and deathly water; the air was thick with confined gases. Our thirsty mules sniffed at the surface, and one dipped her nose boldly in; but she started back with a snort. We tasted the water. It was foul with all the substances most objectionable in a chemist's shop.

Through the woods again to famed Nihapa, dread pool of mystery and horror! Through the pleasant woods, beneath the happy sunshine, over the flowers and fern, to that lovely spot which superstition could make a hell! Ay! it was in sight of those green witnesses that the victims were sacrificed; that crystal water was mottled with their blood; those crimson stains on the cliff were painted by terror to commemorate murder. Where were the eyes of men, that

they saw not the laughing sky, and the merry woods, and the happy flowers? Were they deaf, that they could not understand the dreamy whispers of that gentle Nature? Surely their priests must have drugged their minds, so to deform manly reason, and to overawe compassionate senses! Let us be thankful, English brethren, that we have outgrown all such gloomy superstitions! Are not our eyes wide open? The Manichæan heresy never made any way in England, bless you! and human sacrifices have been disused these two thousand years.

We were much disappointed with the rock paintings, which seem to have suffered greatly since Mr. Squier's time. We could make out none of the figures he engraves, except the crimson hand, which stood out everywhere in startling clearness. The winged snake we long hunted for in vain; but at length he was found behind a tree on the right hand of the path, much higher up than the others. The thickly-pressed leaves had quite sheltered this painting, and the colour was brilliant as when first put on. By climbing the tree we approached it close enough to make an accurate sketch, which Mr. Squier

was probably unable to do. The diameter was about two feet six inches; three tufts of feathers were set about a foot apart round the circumference, and the tail was a bunch of five curled plumes. The head was in outline, and represented some round-eared monster with grim and parted jaws. For the direction of future travellers, we cut off the branches round, but left the sheltering leaves above.

Hundreds of other hieroglyphics were faintly to be traced on the cliffs, in yellow and scarlet outline; but the wind and rain of ages had washed out their design, and we failed to catch that connection which Mr. Squier, thirteen years before, remarked among them. Formerly many more paintings had existed, and the fallen rocks were covered with intricate circles and curious lines. Within a yard or two of us, but quite beyond sight, was said to exist an Indian temple, dug out of the cliff, to which these painted figures bore reference. Although our guide was alarming in his accounts of gigantic alligators in that little lake, I swam far enough out to convince myself that Mr. Squier was right in his description of this so-called temple. It is nothing more

than a natural cavern, though likely enough it was used for sacred purposes by the Indians. If it be true, as we were told, that tiburones, or fresh-water sharks, and alligators of a large size, abound in this water, one may well ask again that eternal question—how did they come there? No streams flow into the lake, or, at least, our guide knew of none, and certainly none flow out of it; and although alligators will, as I know, make strange migrations, the sharks could not so have travelled. A waterspout might bring them, however, and such phenomena are common in Nicaragua. Whatever it may have been formerly, the water is now pure and clean.*

In the evening certain politicians, instigated by—by the winged serpent of Nihapa—devised a notable serenade for General Boneja, a quiet gentleman, who occupied the next room to ours. Not even we ourselves, I suspect, were so much exasperated by these proceedings as was the General, who was compelled, by hopes of the

* *Vide* "Nicaragua: its People, Scenery, &c." By Mr. E. G. Squier. Vol. i, pp. 403-408. This gentleman got up a boat from Managua, and cruised on the lake, but his success was not such as his spirited enterprise deserved. The labour of getting the smallest canoe down such cliffs must have been immense.

next Presidency, to respond. His speech, which we heard distinctly through the wall, was as quiet and sensible as a gentleman's can be under such circumstances, and on that account did not seem to give entire satisfaction. Therefore arose a deputy from Leon, whom we had marked as the most drunken of the Congress. He began with a "Houpla! Nicaragua!" which eloquence so struck the serenaders, that they needed nothing more, being quite capable of keeping *that* up for any length of time. "Houpla! Nicaragua!" "*Houpla!* Nicaragua!" "HOUPLA! *Nicaragua!*"

Poor General Boneja! Poor Don Pedro Obarrios! Our poor selves! For the space of two hours they all with one accord yelled out this chorus.

About ten o'clock the serenaders went away, but the deputies remained. Every one who dared had fled, but a candidate could not venture on a step so unpopular. We were sitting in our own room, smoking as calmly as the noise would permit, when to us, after a fumbling at the door, entered a gentleman in a black suit, mottled with suspicious dust. He was short of stature, large

of head, pallid and pasty of complexion. His narrow, shining eyes glanced hither and thither in a red orbit, as he meandered, with quick, funny little steps towards our table. On safe arrival there, he stared hard at a candle, and we stared calmly at him. After silence of some minutes, our visitor turned to Mr. Jebb, with a slow, sly smile, and murmured, "Señor, mon chapeau?" Mr. Jebb said nothing, so he turned to me: "Adonde, señor; mon chapeau?" I made no reply. He leant back on his heels further than was safe, and precipitately seated himself on the floor, whence he smiled fatly at us. Then frowning with awful suddenness, he snatched up a candle, and hurried in little circular steps towards the bed. "No, Don Drunken Deputy," said Mr. Jebb, rising. "Bed is certainly your best place, but I object to your approaching my curtains with a light!" and so saying, he took the candle away. Delighted to be noticed in any fashion, the Deputy held out his hand, nearly tumbling over it, and whispered delicately, "Chapeau? *Chapeau?*" If we had wished we could not have answered a word. He looked at us sternly, and went towards the street-door, to

unbolt it, but I interposed. "The other way, Don Houpla!" This reminded him of his political views, and he took me severely by the shirt-front, to tell me his opinion about the state of Nicaragua. I led him towards the door; but there incautiously removing my arm, he bolted suddenly, and hastened to Mr. Jebb, by a short cut round three sides of the room. Looking him full in the face, he uttered the mystic word, "Chapeau?" and then backed sharply upon me, staring hard into Mr. Jebb's eyes. I tried to lead him back, but he was off like an eel, careering round the room, candle in hand, and looking for his "chapeau." A bottle was upon a side-table: it caught his eye, and instantly he stood at point, like a dog. Taking advantage of this moment, I put an arm round his waist and pushed him into the corridor, where he sat gently down, murmuring, "Chapeau, señor?"

Now, as before said, it is not my wish to ridicule the Nicaraguan legislature, which, if anything, is too advanced for its constituents; therefore I will put two views of their proceedings side by side, thus: Some witnesses might report that the Congress of 1866, sitting at

Managua, fulfilled its duties with loyalty and enthusiasm; others, equally impartial, might growl that it kicked up a confounded row. It might be hinted that certain members often entertained their friends in kindly hospitality, and discussed affairs of state to a late hour; or it might be rudely stated that they drank like dromedaries, and shouted themselves dumb. One or other of these testimonies is certainly true, and I recommend the reader to adopt them both.

March 3rd.—The gentleman whom we call *The* Drunken Deputy seems to have felt the ejection from our room more keenly than might have been expected from his condition at the time. Sammy tells us that he harangued the grooms and mozos in the courtyard till midnight, telling them how he had harmlessly entered our quarters in search of his "chapeau," and how we had thrown him out with brutal violence. "Ah, but," screamed he, "these he-mules don't know whom they've insulted! Going to Leon, are they? *You* know who I am, and they shall know soon! Ach! they shall see what it is to push the Governor of Leon! I'll follow them whenever they go; if it's to-night, I'll ride after and pass them! All

they shall ever see of Leon is the Presidio and the sentries' bayonets!" In this style he declaimed for an hour, standing in the moonlit corridor, surrounded by a laughing crowd of mozos, whose reverence for the Government must have been much fostered by the exhibition.

In the course of the morning I called on the Minister of the Interior, Don Antonio Silva, upon business, and to him I mentioned the threats of this Governor of Leon. He said the man was quite harmless, and a very good fellow in his way. No doubt he was, but not, I should think, in the way of Congress, and certainly not in our way.

To-day Mr. T—— left us. Though now much ashamed of the "connection," this gentleman is English by birth and rearing, but in his mode of thought more extravagantly Yankee than a Yankee born. He had been a filibuster everywhere where filibustering was to be done, and his leisure moments were employed in plotting against any government that chanced to be uppermost in the land of his temporary sojourn. How many years of his short life he had dragged

a ball after his foot, and worked in convict gangs, I never knew. Not that he was shy about the fact, but that he felt very little interest in past times, or in parties "played out." Nothing had ever been brought against his personal honour; but he was one of those happy soldiers of fortune whose revolvers are just as ready in the nineteenth century as were their forefathers' lances five hundred years ago. There are many such in America, broad-shouldered, good-natured fellows, who'll fight under any banner and in any republican cause. I fancy they have a fuller use of life, these Bedouins, than we steady Fellaheen, cramped and angled as we are with stationary toil. The reason of Mr. T——'s presence in Managua was a peremptory call from the President, who suspected him of moving in the threatened revolution; whether rightly or not I don't know. The interview was most polite on both sides, I believe, but the President's hints were of the very plainest character.

In the evening we mounted again for Mateares, the next stage on the way to Leon. The road across the peninsula was carried over a lofty hill by a series of brickwork terraces, wonderful

to see in Nicaragua, where all other roads are as the conquerors found them, except that they are worn deeper in the mud. The views across the lake of Managua were beautiful; but darkness settled down before we reached the top. However, the moon rose as soon as the sun had set, and by her brilliant light we found Mateares safely. The autumn fires had begun to light up the forest, and their angry glow between black tree-trunks was alone needed for the brigand-like effect of our party. These fires had generally burnt themselves out along the path, but once or twice we rode between flaming walls. The wildness of the scene is not to be described. Cannot the reader fancy the deep black wood and the eager flames; the crackle and the roaring and the quick reverberations; the delicate flowers, and the lace-like moss, and the feathery forest-palms, which sadly showed their beauty in that red light, so soon to wither and shrivel them?

The inn of Nicaragua is so very imperfect in its arrangements, that we usually preferred the "out." Mateares is rather famed on the Leon road for its simplicity, but we had lodged worse in

our ramblings. I have not hitherto described one of these country mesons, of which this was not an unfair specimen.

The hotel boasted two rooms, one more than is usual. The walls were of mud, unsmoothed and unwhitewashed; no attempt whatever had been made to cover their nakedness. Flooring, of course there was none, neither ceiling, but the naked rafters were fringed with cobwebs and big fly-nests. No beds were there; but three hammocks hung from wall to wall across the room. A greasy table balanced itself on three legs in a corner; beneath it was a pile of rotten cordage. Green bunches of plantains hung here and there, pell-mell with saddlebags, sweat-cloths, straps, rags, and calabashes. The floor was of black mud; and a swarm of fowls, roused from their beauty sleep, skurried and clucked under our feet. Two slender tallow dips spread additional gloom through the blackness, glaring red upon our faces by the table, and sparkling among a pile of empty bottles in the farther corner. The mingling of the divers stenches was overpowering.

We passed through the inner door and out

into the courtyard. The great pale sky glimmered overhead, flecked with white wreaths of cloud. A feeble gust of wind rustled heavily among the leaves, and bowed the purple blossoms of the grenadilla above the door. Turning and tossing themselves in the air, the night-birds skimmered ghostlike past, twittering faintly from time to time, as the poor moths glided down their gaping throats. Plain dull birds they were, for the most part, thick of feather but small in body, with a strange look of flatness about them, and a weird stilliness of flight.* The night is for them and their prey, to circle and skimmer in, devouring and devoured; theirs are the only voices that break the silence—the squeak of the bat and the shrill chuckle of the goatsucker, the hum of the beetle and the muffled cry of the hawkmoth.† While we lie awake, a roosting bird starts up with a flirt and a flutter, but in a moment he resettles himself

* Goatsuckers vary little in colour wherever I have found them. Those in Nicaragua have the same delicate blending of brown and black and dun colour, which we admire so much in England.

† In England we have only one species of lepidopteron that makes a sound in its flight—the sphinx atropos, or death's head; but in Nicaragua there are several kinds I noted.

upon the bough and dozes again. A restless mule stamps off the gnats, and rustles sharply among the fodder; a rotting fruit drops dully to the ground; and from the forest comes the crash of a falling bough. And with such pleasant lullabys we fall asleep.

March 4th.—At sunrise we mounted again, and trotted to Nagarotte for breakfast, where we found quite a neat little inn, whitewashed and tiled. This place used to boast a fame for the boldness of its brigands and the excellence of its thieving system; but an example was made of it by General Walker which taught the people that a reputation is sometimes disadvantageous: it is now quiet enough. There is also a great tree here, said to have sheltered the Indians before the conquest, when the "gue-gues," or supreme councils of old men, were held under its spreading branches. Certainly it is a fine tree, of the same genus as the large Indian fig, but scarcely worthy of a tropical reputation.

After an hour's rest at Nagarotte, we pushed on for Pueblo Nuevo, where we stayed three hours and dined. The streets here were fenced

in with "organo," or columnar cactus, ten to twenty-five feet high, and the hut-roofs could scarcely be seen above the hedge. The width of the roads—for streets they could hardly be called—was considerable, and all crossed each other at right angles. We dined in a funny little house, kept by a funny little old woman, who sat in a broken arm-chair, alternately reading her mass-book and staring at us. It was Sunday, and all the women of the place, in coming back from Church, called upon our hostess to look at the "Americanos." In most countries, and in all ranks of life, a "morning call" is an amusing ceremony, especially to the bystanders, but in Central America it is a downright comic performance. The visitor comes in, and is greeted cordially but solemnly, for both parties know well that the eyes of the wor-rld are upon their doings. They pat each other gently on the back, after the funny manner of Old Spain, and then they sit down. And then —why, after a time the caller gets up again, pats her hostess once more upon the back, metaphorically kisses her hands, and goes to her own house—which is next door. But what agonies

of silence rack both parties during the ten minutes they sit opposite to one another. I feel sure they wish to speak, because, while holding a low opinion of the native intellect, I can't think the visitor would come in this solemn manner merely to stare at her next-door neighbour, whom she must see, unceremoniously, about eleven hours and a half out of the twelve. Yet they never speak. I've watched them for long and long, when they have thought us all asleep after our tiring rides, but I never knew them to converse otherwise than by glances and writhes of torment. Why do they come? As to that, why do I come?—why comest thou?—why does he come?—in much the same manner, and almost as clumsily. Yet we sometimes thought there were two sides to this traditional burlesque of a brighter life, and one seemed very sad.

We left Pueblo Nuevo in the evening, passing, as is usual, almost in a step from the street to the forest. A long, dreary ride we had in the darkness and the thick undergrowth. Mr. Jebb nearly succeeded in breaking our necks that night. He had pushed ahead with the guide,

while I assisted Ellis to mend his crupper, which had burst in fording a stream. This was no easy matter in the darkness, and we had scarcely finished when a faint pistol-shot reached our ears—then another. A fight at last! Off we set through the forest, as hard as our mules could gallop, crouching down upon the saddle-bow, and tucking in our feet to avoid the branches. Scored down the back, whipped in the face, banged on the shins—that was a scramble such as none of us will care to take again. Another pistol-shot! We drove in the spurs harder; we whooped until the forest rang, and the congos howled in answer; and when we reached Mr. Jebb—having escaped a thousand dangerous chances—we found him happily setting fire to a fallen tree by the road-side. The pistol-shots were simply "to sharpen us up, you know!" So, with a laugh and a growl, we set forward again through the inky forest.

Just as the clouds broke and let out the moon-beams, we entered the fertile plain which surrounds the city of Leon. We had already ridden fifty miles that day, and both man and

beast began to be aware of it. All of us will long remember that flat and weary stage over the plain of Leon, which seemed endless. The moon rose at our back, and threw gigantic shadows of horsemen before the path. In front, far past the city, was a hill which flamed and flickered strangely, now mounting up into a sheet of fire, now fading blackly. At first we thought some new volcano of awful violence must have broken out by Leon, but the calmness round, and the purity of the air soon satisfied us it was but a burning jungle.

Such a long, dreary ride! Exactly at midnight we rode into the city, after the weariest of all our Nicaraguan marches. So tired were all the party, that when the sentries called out to us to dismount in crossing the Plaza, we obeyed without a word. At any other time the soldiers would not, I believe, have dared to ask such a thing from a foreigner; and certainly no foreigner but ourselves, tired out as we were, would have condescended to notice the challenge. Every man has a right to respect precisely what he pleases; but "machos" and heretics in general hold the Leon Cathedral to be an

excessively ugly building, and see no reason to dismount when passing it. I trust none of us will ever wantonly insult another's religion, whatever it may be; but, on the other hand, no man has a right to insult our manhood by exacting a ceremony which makes us ridiculous in our own eyes. I hold it cowardly to bow one's self before a sentry's bayonet in such a cause; and that night we were tired with a ride of seventy miles, almost at a foot's pace, hungry, and dusty, and aching, and in fact we *were* cowards. How amazed we felt in the morning, when clean and fresh and cheerful, to think that we had bowed ourselves before such a clumsy idol as the cathedral, at the bidding of a barefooted Nebuchadnezzar carrying a tin "gas-pipe!"

The present town of Leon was founded in 1610; but there was a former settlement of the same name situated on the lake of Managua, which is sometimes called the Lake of Leon in consequence. In 1665, Thomas Gage, the English traveller, describes this capital as a "Mahomet's Paradise, where pleasure was the only pursuit of the luxurious inhabitants; who

shunned every kind of labour, and left to others the toil of commerce, for which it was so advantageously situated." But only twenty years after Gage, another party of English travellers "gave an account" of Leon, and a very disagreeable account, too—for the inhabitants. In 1685 the great Dampier and his buccaneers sacked the city and burnt it, with the cathedral. The latter disaster was probably more felt by the Spaniards than any loss of their own, for Leon has always been a metropolitan seat, and the bishop had powers not inferior to Guatemala itself. After immense preparation of money and material, the first stone of the new cathedral was laid in 1706; and thirty-seven years later the building was pronounced as ugly as the architect could make it, and was thereupon opened with much ceremony. Besides its uses as a temple, the new cathedral was designed as a fortress, and between these two aims lay hideousness. As a fortress its merits have been often tested. Of its success as a cathedral I am not qualified to speak; but there have been more murders committed within sight of that holy building than ever were wrought be-

fore a temple of heathendom in the same time.

There are many causes for the democratic spirit of Leon. Firstly, the Indians of that plain are, and feel themselves to be, quite equal in intelligence with the mestizo population, and superior to them in civilization. Jealousy of Granada, which is essentially aristocratic, caused an early alliance between the upper and lower classes of Leon, which eventually placed the latter in power, as such leagues always must. Thirdly must be counted the influence of the bishop and clergy, aspiring to supremacy, and confident in their ability to guide the masses. Fourthly, the mere consciousness of numbers. To this city Central America owes its disunion and misery. Whether the confederation could have lived or not, Leon was the first to set the central power at nought, and to demonstrate its helplessness.

In 1821 the authority of Spain was cast off. The following year was passed in conflicts with Mexican troops; but in 1823 the Federal Union of the five states, Guatemala, San Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica, was sealed, and for a few months the country was at peace. But

on the 13th of January, 1824, the mob of Leon first raised its voice and hand. · Basilio Carillo, the Commandante, was summarily deposed, and Carmen Salazar was placed in his position. With this change there was peace until the 4th of May, when the people, aided by mutinous soldiers, drove away Giusto Milla, the Governor, and raised Pablo Melendez to his post. On the 22nd of July an artillery private, named Cleto Ordonez, was proclaimed Commander-General of Nicaragua. On the 6th of August the Indian suburb of Subtiaba rose against the new authorities; and before this insurrection was quelled, many streets were levelled, hundreds of people were killed, and the foulest crimes committed.

Granada, in its own interest, had on this occasion united with Leon in favour of Cleto Ordonez, and both towns were attacked almost simultaneously by the friends of order. Leon was assaulted on the 9th of August, by two thousand men of Managua and Chinendega, which towns long remained faithful to the Union. On the 14th of the same month Granada was attacked, but the Federals had no success in either at-

tempt. Managua was besieged in her turn between the 25th of August and the 1st of September, but the assailants were beaten off But on the 13th of September the soldiers of Managua and Chinendega, under command of Colonel Chrisanto Sacano and Juan José Salas, marched upon Leon; and after several engagements, carried the suburbs by assault on the evening of September 22nd. After this success we hear of a siege lasting one hundred and fourteen days, during which such horrors as the cold north could not dream of were perpetrated by these mad southerners. Quarter was given to none, not to the feeble old man nor to the child unborn. Every tie of affection or blood was cut with the sword. One brother has murdered another many a time since the days of Cain; but Leon first showed that men could be so possessed with devils as to murder their own sisters and nieces for political quarrels. The blood of women and children and old men is said to have flowed in a crimson cascade down the church steps. The whole city was burnt except the plaza and the small space around, which Ordonez defended. That siege of one

hundred and fourteen days set its stamp upon the whole future history of Nicaragua. Those who remember that time, though they have gone through many a red scene since, still shudder and blanch when they speak of the massacre in Subtiaba Church and the torturing of the women and children.

On the 4th of January, 1825, the besiegers retired, leaving the proud capital a mere heap of ruins, inhabited by a population lessened by more than the half. It is not necessary to follow the history further in detail. General Arcec, of San Salvador, restored the Federal authority in a few months, and until the 14th of September, 1827, Leon enjoyed peace. On that day Cleto Ordonez, now colonel, created disturbances in his own interest; but they were soon appeased by the very helplessness of the authorities. Outbreaks and pronunciamientos took place from year to year and from month to month; but the next affair in which the city was besieged ocurred in 1836, when Branlio Mondiolo raised an insurrection against the Governor, José Zepeda, and murdered him. But in his turn he was put to death by the Vice-

governor, José Nunez. In 1838 the Federal union of Central America was formally broken up; and since that time Leon and Granada have been engaged in civil war almost without a break. To give some idea of the confusion that prevailed even during the time of the Federation, I will quote Mr. Dunlop's report. "During the brief period of the independent existence of the nominal republic of Central America (between 1823 and 1838), a country inferior in extent to any other of the provinces of America once belonging to Spain, and only containing about two millions of inhabitants, *no fewer than three hundred and ninety-six persons have exercised the supreme power of the republic and the different states.*" This I think requires no comment.

After five regular sacks within thirty-two years, Leon cannot be expected to show much remains of its old magnificence; nor, in fact, does it. The population is barely twenty thousand, even including the Indian suburbs; and, like Rivas, the city is a mass of brick mounds, empty spaces, tottering, fire-stained walls, and mud-built huts. After the fearful scenes of 1824, it suffered most severely from the San

Salvador and Honduras troops, under Malespina de Ferrera, who sacked it on 24th of January, 1845. The bishop's palace was the only building of any importance left standing when they retired; but since then a few families have patched up their tottering residences, and occupy a corner of their fathers' homes. Yet Leon is a busier seeming town than Granada, and the people, to our thinking, were better mannered and finer looking.

The cathedral has "a mortal deal of stone in it;" but Wren himself could not have planned a graceful building if he had been bound to casemate the towers, and make the roof a regular redoubt. To answer these aims, a design in the vilest taste of the Renaissance was chosen, in which the roof and walls would bear anything except criticism. Five million dollars were spent on this deformed pile, which has been used alternately as a cathedral and a fortress; the boom and clatter of cannon on the roof, and the thud of balls striking its massive sides, being no unusual accompaniment to the swelling organ below.

We put up at the European Hotel, kept by

Captain Cauty, the father of that Colonel Cauty who, with Captain Spencer, drove the filibusters from Nicaragua; an effort of generalship and audacity beyond the native powers. I can say but little of the neighbourhood of Leon. Subtiaba, the great Indian suburb, which has a separate municipality and separate officers, is built on the site of Nagrando, one of the richest of the ancient cities. The Nagrandans seem to have been a branch of the Toltec race, and their descendants still contrast most favourably with the Indians of Rivas and the Isthmus. The latter appear to have spoken the Aztec tongue, and to have lived in continual enmity with the Nagrandans. Mr. Squier, with the assistance of Colonel Francisco Zapata, obtained several hundred words from the people of Subtiaba, which are published in his work, side by side with the Dirian which he recovered at Masaya. It is difficult to see any connection between these two languages, as given, though the old chroniclers apparently considered them identical. Upon this subject I have already spoken.

March 7th.—We climbed to the top of the

cathedral, and looked over that lovely plain which was well called Mahomet's Paradise. We looked across the red roofs of the town, across the tiny patches of cultivation, across the forest waving darkly, to the blue volcanoes and the glittering sea. The nine craters of the Marabios defended the plain on the northward; to the south were the tall mountains of Costa Rica; on the west glimmered the Pacific; on the east towered Momotombo. A plain shut in on every side, and guarded by nature itself; and here the cicerone drew our attention to the bullet-marks which pitted every inch of stone. Thirty cannons, he told us, had been mounted on this roof. Against whom? Why, against the mala gente, which had been composed of every party in turn. The Leon Cathedral has well fulfilled that Christian precept, to be all things to all men.

In the evening four wandering Neapolitans gave a concert in the corridor of the hotel, and the rank and fashion of Leon assembled to hear. The fashion seemed to run towards yellow satin, and as to the rank, we had too much of it, for a great crowd gathered outside, which was rank

also. More fully to mark their position, the young señoras wore wreaths of *artificial* flowers. What profound knowledge of human nature must he have had who first imported calico roses and muslin daffodils to that land of lovely blossom! With all the glitter of a Parisian headdress, the señoritas of Leqn showed poorly beside the Libertad "muchachas;" but then, one adornment cost twopence-halfpenny, and the other was gathered in the first thicket. Surely we would raise no parrot cry against fashion. If our lady's style be the "beauty unadorned," let her wear white muslin and ribbons of virginal blue; or if her loveliness be of the stately, let her robe be ten yards across, and her hair tired à la fantaisie. Qu'est ce que ça nous fait, à nous autres? But what purse-proud barbarism is that which throws aside all taste and fitness, to array itself in jingling dollars? If the artificial rose be more beautiful than the real,—oh! happy belles who have a bank account,—buy it and wear it, whether in your wreathy hair or on your cheek; but that snobbish stupidity which would oust the waxen jasmines, and the fairy orchids, and the trailing

ferns of tropical nature, in favour of twopenny French roses made of calico and tinsel, is still I hope far from any English society except the very lowest.

In regard to the concert itself, I remember the wandering minstrels played Verdi's Miserere as a waltz, which seemed odd.

March 8th.—Stories of mere shooting and fighting are I think the very dreariest entertainment that can be offered a reader, and they are certainly disagreeable writing. The animals of Nicaragua are known well enough—at least all that we shot or saw—and adventures do not happen every day. It seems so stupid to put on record, for as long as paper and print shall last, that on a certain day I shot a sparrow, at a given hour Mr. Jebb bagged a beetle, and to note the minute when Ellis brought down a tomtit. Unless there be something noteworthy in the nature of the sport, some amusing incident, or some new observation, it seems poor taste to talk of one's bow and spear. But on this day I had a very funny escape, perhaps worth telling.

I mounted my little mule, Baby, at dawn, for

a stroll round Subtiaba, taking with me a light shot gun. Baby's sharp little hoofs soon left the town behind, and I reached an open country, broken here and there with fields of maize, and much cut up with volcanic crevasses and sun-cracked patches of red clay. There was nothing to shoot except monkeys and parrots, and, though the latter are capital eating, we did not want them at the moment. About a league from the town I came to a bit of jungly ground, bristling with long grass and wild pine-apple. A few stumpy trees, hung with orchids and thick cacti and grey moss, dotted it over at intervals. In trotting past I caught a glimpse of a very large snake gliding delicately, like a long-drawn skein of shiny silk, across the clearing. He vanished in a moment under the prickles of the wild pine; but I had time to recognize the "boba," a species of python which sometimes reaches a very great size. This was plainly a notable specimen, so I jumped down, and quickly fastened Baby to a tree, for her habit was to bolt whenever she found an opportunity. When I reached the pine clump my snake was gone, and I sought everywhere in

vain. Close by was a big rotten tree, which seemed a likely spot for a boba to lie in, and I turned in that direction. There was no hollow near the ground through which so big a snake could creep, and I walked round to the other side. Here the grass was longer, and a tall weed, which looks like a fleshy fern, grew luxuriantly. A sharp movement among the weed caught my eye, but before three steps were taken I saw it was caused by no snake, and stopped short, not caring to face a javalino with a shot gun. But in another second the animal broke cover, and passed in a slouching trot across a patch of sun-baked clay about twenty yards off. A tiger cub, by luck! No, an ocelot! The dainty beauty I have loved my whole life long. Without a thought of after proceedings, as madly and stupidly as any schoolboy, I shouldered a light fourteen bore, and sent a charge of No. 3 shot into the hind-quarters of the beast!*

* The ocelet, Aztec, "ocelotl," one of the few words of that ancient tongue which have come into our use, is the loveliest lady that walks this earth, and this first view of her savage beauty lost me my head. I had never seen one wild before, nor have I since. This at Leon seemed to me about as tall as a dog-fox, but much longer, of course.

With the sound of the gun came my senses back to me, and I "felt cold down the small of my back," like Mr. Buckstone upon several occasions. An inch or two to the right or left in the course of those trusty pellets would have so far changed the event, that instead of my story of the ocelot, the ocelot would probably tell a story of *me*. I suppose it was a "shave" as near as ever man had. But the shots served me well, for they disabled one of her hind legs, and injured the other. She turned, with a snap of white teeth and a scream of rage,—then came leaping towards me with green flashing eyes, wide with fury, and lips drawn up above the pallid gums. At about six yards distance I pulled trigger again, aiming for the left eye and shoulder —and missed fire! I ran back a few steps, and fired—the cap snapped harmlessly again! I think if any possible arm had been at hand I should have stood then; but to face the charge of that lovely little devil, with a clubbed gun weighing 7 lbs. 4 ozs., was beyond my madness, even on that mad morning. But somehow those clear green eyes fascinated me—as green eyes ever will fascinate if they be the true colour,—

and not till the poor beauty was limping within two bounds did I turn to—to—in fact, to run. When I reached the tree, where Baby was plunging and snorting furiously, my pursuer was scarcely twenty feet behind. I tore the halter undone in a moment, caught up the bridle, and had just got one foot in the stirrup, when Baby bolted as hard as fear could drive her deer-like limbs. We *did* go! Before I was quite fixed in the saddle, or had gained any control over our course, she had covered a couple of hundred yards, leaping the suspicious places as no mule ever leaped before. Then she dashed under a bough so low there was not fifteen inches to spare above the saddle, and I had but just time to throw myself right along her back. But a stumpy twig struck me a dizzying blow on the head, and the main-branch scored me all down the backbone. I retained enough consciousness to hold on, and might have recovered the ill-hap, but that we came to a deep gully, which Baby descended after the headlong manner of an animal which scarcely ever loses footing. Here I rolled heavily off, falling upon my gun. Helpless and dizzy, with half my bones shaken

and bleeding, I lay for a few moments, then got up, and tottered on. At the first house they had caught Baby by the long halter trailing behind; they had seen us pass by, and she was not to be mistaken. I remounted, and reached the hotel, where the Indian who had caught the mule brought me the skin of my ocelot an hour or two after. He had easily tracked and shot her.

We had intended to start for the Embarkito, whither our luggage had already gone, at three in the afternoon, but two false starts detained us until nearly sunset. A certain portmanteau which we had kept with us could not be balanced upon a pack-saddle, and twice we turned back to refix it. In passing the house of the American consul we called to bid them farewell, and there saw the last of poor Mr. F——, who had been Secretary of the Hacienda to General Walker. Three days afterwards he died of lock-jaw, caused by the extraction of a "negua," or jigger, from the ball of his foot. A pleasant ride it was to the Embarkito! The forest was ebony black, and there were two or three deep streams on

the way. Once we got fairly lost, but after much whooping and perspiration found our way back to the path. We literally could not see a hand's breadth before us, and all got sharp blows across the face and limbs from the unpruned branches. Mr. Jebb seriously injured one eye; but, with heads down at the saddle-bow, we struggled on, until, about two o'clock in the morning, we reached the warehouse of Don Luis Mallié, who already had care of our baggage, sent on from Leon. We lay down on his warehouse floor, and slept till dawn.

March 10th.—After much trouble, a leaky canoe was found to take us down the estuary to Realejo, where the Pacific steamer lay; but before clearing the huts of Embarkito our craft began to sink. The stalwart flat-men had refused to take us on board their cargo-boat; but when they saw that we were determined to go, and observed the real danger, they relented, and we all climbed on to the cotton bales. Through the green vista of mangroves, under the fringed arch of big trees, between the banks of slimy mud, we floated with the tide towards the ocean. At length the

broad bay of Realejo opened before us, studded with low, green islets, and calmly rippling in the vertical sun. After a bath, we went on board the "Guatemala," which sailed the same evening.

CHAPTER IV.

Harbour of Realejo—Captain Pim's railroad—Character of the port—Commerce—Punt 'Arenas—How they do things in Costa Rica—Thriving commerce—Civilization—Marauding crabs—Cultivation of sugar—Crowded road—An adventure for somebody—Esparsa—Curious story of Sir Francis Drake's buccaneers—Disappearance of the mutineers—New theory for the white Indians—A San Matteo belle—The Rio Frio again—Atenas—A thriving inn—A weary ride—San José de Costa Rica—Third attempt at a Frio exploration—Justice to the Costa Ricans—Threats and coldness of the leading men—Frio stories—Market in San José—Climate and drinking—The chancellor of the exchequer at the faro table—Hatted class in Costa Rica—Cathedral—Easter decorations—Costa Rican army—Droll scene—Interview with the president elect—Farewell dinner—Departure for the Serebpiqui.

WE examined the harbour of Realejo with great interest, for this is designed as the Pacific terminus of Captain Pim's Transatlantic route. The town itself we did not see, as it lies rather more than six miles from the anchorage; "but it boasts about twelve hundred inhabitants, mostly employed in attendance on the shipping, or in carrying on the commerce of the port.

Realejo has greatly increased in importance since it became a calling place for steamers running between San Francisco and Panama." We were told that vessels of five hundred tons could ride within half a mile of the town; and Mr. Dunlop asserts that in the time of Spanish rule vessels of three hundred and four hundred tons were built "at Realejo:" at the town itself, I presume, as the wharfs are quite modern. "The wood here is much superior to that of Guayaquil, and more durable, consisting, as it does, of cedar and mahogany, besides a wood resembling Malabar teak, and a vast number of hard woods, said to be imperishable. The trade of this port is, however, yearly declining, from the wretched state of the government of Niacaragua, *which is composed of the worst thieves and assassins of the state.*" Bad as things may be still in this country, it is gratifying to think they were even worse some time ago: the latter part of Mr. Dunlop's grumble is not true now.

Of the port itself Sir Edward Belcher says: "It has two entrances, both of which are safe under proper precaution, and in all weathers. The depths vary from two to seven fathoms, and

good and safe anchorage extends for several miles: the rise and fall of tide is eleven feet, full and change three hours and six minutes. Docks or slips may therefore easily be constructed, and timber is readily to be procured of any dimensions. Wood, water, and immediate necessaries and luxuries are plentiful and cheap.

"The perfect tranquillity of the anchorage offers facilities for every kind of repair; there are even beaches upon which, as it were upon a natural gridiron, vessels may be placed; the only real inconvenience is the distance from Realejo, and the necessity of tiding there in the conveyance of merchandise." This latter difficulty, suggested by the French surveyors, is easily remedied by moving the town to the port. Dread of buccaneers, who repeatedly sacked it in the seventeenth century, induced the people to build so far from the sea.

On the whole, Captain Pim could scarcely wish for a better* terminus on the Pacific coast;

* "I may confidently say," says Mr. Dunlop, "that Realejo is at least as good a port as any in the known world. I have seen Portsmouth, Rio Janeiro, Port Jackson, Talenjana, Callao, and Guayaquil, and to all of these I consider it decidedly superior.

and no great river threatens to silt up the harbour, as so frequently happens on the Atlantic shore. The exports of Realejo were once very considerable, and of late years they have been again increasing; but the greater part is of natural productions—timber and gums and bark and sap of trees. A few hundred bales of cotton still leave the port, principally bound for Costa Rica; a little cacao for the other Central American States; and a little crude sugar. Exportation of indigo is now almost nil. In 1847, when an attempt was made to "take stock" of the country, the growth of this dye was estimated at 750,000 pounds, worth one dollar per pound. Hides have much increased of late. We were told that 200,000 skins of deer alone passed to the States in 1864. Ox-hides sell at from one to two shillings, but the supply has diminished of late years. The whole exports of Nicaragua may probably be 300,000 dollars; and imports much the same. This estimate would not include the cattle trade between this republic and its neighbours, which is sometimes equal to all the other exports, and sometimes falls to nothing. The oxen are in general driven overland to San

Miguel, in San Salvador, where they are sold at a great fair.

March 11*th.*—Reached the roads of Punt 'Arenas at sunset, too late for landing. This curious settlement is built, as its name implies, upon a bare sandspit, and every breeze of heaven blows upon it freely; but beside such a gentle ocean as the Pacific, one may safely found one's house upon the sand. This is virtually the only port of Costa Rica, and its commerce is very large, comparatively. As a harbour it is imperfect, for the anchorage is bad, and the water so shallow, that a vessel drawing over seven feet must lie a league from the town; the landing also is often dangerous, though two islands lying in the gulf protect the roads in some measure. But all attempts to settle the admirable coves abounding in the Gulf of Nicoya have been abandoned with incredible loss of life.

In contrast with Realejo, which is not entered by twenty vessels in the year, except the Pacific Mail Steamers, Punt 'Arenas can always show a few tall masts. Coffee has been a guardian angel to Costa Rica. While the other four states of

the former Union have been robbing, murdering, and falling back, this, the smallest among them, has been steadily advancing in wealth and civilization. A revolution in Costa Rica is conducted in an orderly manner, and every one is too eager to get back to his coffee-trees to waste unnecessary time. If the government must be overthrown, say the planters, Carajo! let's do it between the crops. If any one must be shot, cry the merchants, Carrai! get it over before the warehouses open. These worthy people will *not* have any changes, whether for good or evil, that may possibly cause disturbance. A thinking President is an abomination in their eyes; the man wanted is a solid coffee-grower, who will make roads, conciliate the clergy, and support protection of everything. Well! And the system pays. Costa Rica has 135,000 inhabitants, at the very outside, but her imports are 1,350,000 dollars, with a tendency to double in ten years. Nicaragua has 250,000 souls, at the lowest estimate, and her exports are 300,000 dollars, with no particular tendency. Of the other states we know no more than that their commerce is a mere nothing.

March 12th.—As soon as he sets foot on this shore the traveller is struck with the comparative whiteness of the people, and the signs of their prosperity. The streets of Punt 'Arenas are provided with lamps, the houses have hinged doors, and, instead of a close iron grating, the windows are protected with shutters. Pavement of course there is not; but the sand is so light and fine that the water-carts make it a pleasant footing enough. When it is dry one sinks in to the ankle, and the houses are always full of fine dust carried in by the evening winds. Many buildings are of wood, bought in San Francisco and sent out in pieces. The windows have glass in them, good old-fashioned clocks stand in the stores, and we were credibly informed that many people use beds. In Nicaragua we had not seen such a thing between November and March—between the Union Hotel, Greytown, and the European Hotel, Leon. A very strange species of land crab lives in the sand at Punt 'Arenas. He marches about the streets at night, and attacks in column, entering the houses by any tiny hole, and making most awful havoc among the domestic utensils. He will eat any-

thing he can find, from a chicken to an arm-chair, but a dishcloth is his especial delight. He knocks over the dishes, breaks the crockery, and spoils the household most effectually. A dead specimen was shown to me; a bluish-brown fellow, with very long legs.

We landed among a "block" of bullock-waggons and coffee-bags, almost as thickly pressed as in Cheapside at midday. Fine, stalwart-looking peons, as white in colour and feature as Tuscans, stood beside their oxen, feeding them kindly with sugar-cane. Such beautiful animals were the latter, mostly light in colour, with large, soft black eyes. Evidently they were carefully tended; and no doubt the diet of sugar-cane, which is usual in Costa Rica, contributed much to the gloss and roundness of their hides. This cane is not the Asiatic species, which has been generally introduced for sugar-making purposes, but the kind growing naturally in tropical America. It is much smaller and slenderer than the planted cane, but we understood that there was little, if any, difference in the quantity of sap yielded by either kind, the American being much more juicy than the Asiatic. All the

sugar cultivation of Costa Rica is carried on by Government, for no profit can be made by the planter unless he may also dispose of the refusé in the shape of rum, which is here, as in Nicaragua, a monopoly of the Government. Several foreigners we heard of who had tried the growth of sugar without illegal distillation, but all had been compelled to abandon the attempt. In Nicaragua, however, where there must be the same restriction, sugar plantations pay largely. Of course there are many objections to monopolies of this kind, which will always be farmed out; but such is the dislike of the Spanish Creoles to pay any taxes whatever, that Government cannot otherwise be carried on. A few years since, some Germans, of whom there are numbers in Costa Rica, set up a brewery, which instantly reached great success; but the Government, feeling a rapid loss of revenue, added fifty per cent. to their licence-fee at one stroke, and, on finding that insufficient, added fifty per cent. more, which the brewers were of course unable to bear. English beer has a great sale in Costa Rica, but the high price prevents its general use. Here also they even drink

stout and porter, which have no sale whatever in Nicaragua.

As soon as we landed at Punt 'Arenas, we made inquiries for mules to take us up to San José, the capital; but every animal in the town was at Esparsa, the first stage on the road, and it was necessary to send a mozo on to fetch them back. They were promised for us at four o'clock in the morning, but we did not set forth until five o'clock in the afternoon. The road lay along the gulf of Nicoya for about two miles; and as the sun sank over the Pacific, sea and beach, and forest and mountain, glittered with prismatic colour. Trotting over the wave-hardened sand, strewn with shells and seaweed, we met long caravans of bullock-waggons, all laden with coffee. The contrast with Nicaragua was striking. Tall, white-looking drivers strode before their oxen, with the long goad resting upon the wooden yoke; children shouted and splashed as they raced through the waves after their father's waggon; quick-pacing mules ambled past, carrying well-dressed men and women. It was a scene of business and excitement not to be equalled by any road in Europe, upon an ordi-

nary occasion. The returning waggons were often fitted with a hood and scarlet curtains, between which the merry faces of girls and children peeped out at the strangers. All through those two miles of beach there was scarcely a break in the double line of coffee-waggons and horsemen.

Presently we turned inland, and rode along a broad avenue of big trees, filled in with a dense hedge of bamboo. Palm-trees and palmettoes of every species were there, mingled with those forest giants for which Costa Rica is famed. It is lovely, that San José road; not in the uncared-for beauty of the jungle, but as roughly trained to the service of man. So great is the traffic in rude bullock-carts, that at every hundred yards a great tree has been left to divide the currents, and the rope-like lianas hang down from its branches, and wave crimson blossoms in the traveller's face. The thick bamboos are cut and tended roughly, that their crooked thorns may not obstruct the pathway. Here and there is a timber-built shanty, where thirsty waggoners may help themselves to aguardiente on the payment of a dime, or more ambitious travellers

may drain the beer of Britain—Allsopp's, or Tennant's. Why is thy name omitted, oh Bass! our benefactor? Is the beer thou brewest too tender for Costa Rican climes?

About ten at night we reached Esparsa, the first stage. The last two miles I had outridden the party, and was slowly jogging up a hill, meditating upon the loveliness of Nature, when my mule suddenly shied at something lying on the road. I dismounted to examine, and found it to be a jacket, quite wet. On lighting a match, I found my fingers stained with blood. A pleasant situation on a lonely road! I burnt out all my matches in hunting the neighbourhood, revolver in hand, but no other suspicious sign was visible. No house was in sight; so when my feeble illumination had all gone out, I mounted again and trotted on, with a reflection that violence of any sort is rare in this country, and what would be a certain proof of outrage and murder in Nicaragua, is no more criminating here than it would be in England, if so much.

Esparsa—Anglicè, Sparta—is a little village well built and cleanly. The green plaza is surrounded with trees, and the houses are provided

with doors and wooden shutters. Fragments of pavement, still remaining, show the prosperity it could boast shortly after the conquest, when this was one of the most thriving towns in the Captaincy of Guatemala. But the English buccaneers, under Sir Francis Drake, sacked and burnt it, and it has not since recovered. At present, however, it is a pretty little place enough, and if Captain Pim's railway do not draw the commerce of San José towards the Atlantic coast—which is its natural outlet—Esparsa must continue to flourish with rapid increase, lying as it does on the high road to Punt 'Arenas and the Gulf of Nicoya. A curious story is told in Costa Rica of this expedition of Sir Francis Drake. When the town was gutted, the majority of the buccaneers naturally wished to retreat immediately, being in no position to fight the powerful force which the Spaniards could easily raise against them. But a great minority—five hundred, as the tradition goes—wearied of their perilous life, mutinied, expressing their determination to remain in this spot and face the enemy. Sir Francis Drake had probably neither wish nor power to compel obedience from so large a body,

and accordingly he retired to the gulf, after a fair division of the booty. The mutineers lived merrily in Esparsa, being, I dare say, as kindly received by the señoras of that day as filibusters are at present, until the Spaniards came upon them with forces so overwhelming that they could not attempt to hold the town. As De Lussan said, upon a similar occasion,* "The term of dangers and miseries which fate had in store for them was not yet come, and they could not take advantage of the favourable opportunity which now offered, to 'stay' in these parts of the world, which, though very charming and agreeable to those settled there, yet did not appear so to a handful of men, without shipping, the most part of the time without victuals, and wandering amidst a multitude of enemies, against whom they were obliged to be continually on their guard." Sir Francis Drake's mutineers, wishing to stay, found this course just as difficult as did the French buccaneers wishing to get away, and their reckless folly bore the consequences which

* In his account of the sack of Granada, Nicaragua, in 1686, De Lussan is referring to the attempt the buccaneers then made to reach the Atlantic by the Lake and Rio San Juan. This party wished to go, as the mutineers wished to stay.

they themselves must have foreseen. Hemmed in seawards, and threatened with overpowering force in the city, they fell back upon the woods, intending to cut their way to the Mosquito coast, where they could always find friendly Indians and reinforcements of adventurous countrymen. But they never appeared in the Mosquito territory; nor from that day forward was anything heard of this bold band. It is believed by many in Costa Rica that the white Indians of the Rio Frio, called Pranzos, or Guatusos, to whom I have so often referred, are the descendants of these Englishmen, and indeed the tradition is possible enough:—the Frio lies direct upon the oblique route which they would probably take for the Mosquito territory. De Lussan's party were more fortunate in their attempt to cross the continent. After sacking every city from San Miguel to Punt 'Arenas, they took the forest in the Gulf of Fonseca, and cut their way through Nicaragua and Honduras to Cape Gracios a Dios, reaching home in safety, and carrying their hard-earned dollars with them. Let fools and formalists say what they will, the world owes some of its most stirring histories to the wondrous

bravery of the buccaneers; and England, in especial, may date her naval glory from the days of those fearless freebooters. They deserve a higher place in Westminster Abbey than nine-tenths of the national benefactors whose feeble amiability is exalted there.

March 13th.—We started at six o'clock in the morning for San Matteo, having passed the night in comfortable beds at one of the inns of Esparsa. The road was hilly and the dust a foot deep. The bullock-waggons formed long caravans going either way, and hundreds of well-dressed horsemen trotted along. We met several parties of ladies, in riding-habits, and escorted by servants, with whom we had a steady race all the way to San Matteo. Politeness, I regret to say, was not shown on either side, for the dust was so thick upon that crowded road as to leave no room for such delicate observances. Every horseman raced against every one else, for the last of each party could scarcely breathe, and even we in front could not see two feet beyond our mules' heads. I never saw such dust.

About half-past nine we reached San Matteo, a neat, timber-built village, looking painfully

modern. The inn where we stayed—I believe there are two or three in the village—was kept by a sturdy young fellow, seemingly just married to a very pretty woman. Our hostess was much above the cares of housekeeping; a crowd of admirers stood round the door where she sat sewing. Among these we identified two lawyers and two priests; the others composed the whole upper class of the village. Gentlemen of the Social Science Association, the sight of our pretty hostess sitting in her doorway, surrounded by worshippers, was more valuable than a volume of your essays. So long as there are pretty women in the world, whether savage or civilized, so long will "social" questions continue to puzzle your professors.

Here we heard further accounts of the expedition against the Guatusos, now organising in San José. The stories they told us were even more awful than usual, as these poor Indians now appeared to be cannibals also. Our hostess stopped her confidential whispers with a tall priest to stare at us, when Sammy mentioned we were going to explore the Frio, and her admirers seceded in a body; partly, I suppose,

because they were not in favour that morning, and partly to see more closely the men who were bent on such an awful fate. The stories of treasure, of emeralds, and gold mines, poured out gaily.

About three o'clock we left San Matteo for Atenas, which was reached after six hours' hard riding. The road was carried over mountains of considerable height, by solid rock cuttings. After sunset it became very cool. The village of Atenas was crammed with bullock-waggons: when we arrived it was difficult to ride through the broad street, and all night long they were going and coming. The hotel we selected had a red lamp outside, "quite human like," as Mr. Cash said to me when we saw a grindstone in Ometepec. The interior of our inn was crammed with travellers and baggage, and five or six different parties were devouring supper. The walls of the room were covered with pictures of every possible class; saints hung amicably beside dancing girls, and virgins were cheek by jowl with drunken Dutchmen.

If every night of the year be as busy as that we passed in his hotel, our host of Atenas must

be making a rapid fortune. None of the waiters went to bed, and one of his sons was always on duty. Such cooking, and feeding, and drinking, in kitchen and dining-room! Such shouting from the stables, such jingling of spurs, and screaming of cart-wheels. All night long there was not a moment's stay, for I was up nearly all the time, looking on in silent amazement. The dining-room was crowded with sleepers, some of them ladies in riding-habits. Many foreigners were present, and not a few, both of natives and strangers, had partaken too freely of the government monopoly. It was one of the most curious scenes I ever beheld, only to be compared to the bustle on board an emigrant ship when about to sail. Coffee, coffee, coffee, was the subject of discussion everywhere. What the crop was likely to be; whose estate was in the market; what rate of interest Mr. T—— was demanding; the new mode of planting, and schemes of irrigation; these were the topics I heard all night through. English, Spanish, French, and German were the languages, and every one spoke at the top of his voice, and generally with his mouth full.

March 14th.—At three in the morning I roused Mr. Jebb and Ellis, and we set forth through the long, crowded street of Atenas. Twenty or thirty people were sitting on horseback round the inn door, carrying torches and lanterns; they were waiting the arrival of General Somebody, who had slept in the inn. Dozens of people were lying about the verandah, not a few of them drunk; for sobriety is little esteemed in Costa Rica, or, at least, is little practised. After rescuing various articles of harness from the hands of the spoilers, who had appropriated them with that coolness for which Costa Ricans are famed throughout America, we set forth, picking our way among the slumbering bullocks, covered waggons, and piles of coffee bags which blocked the street. The night was dark as pitch, and we needed all our eyes to avoid collisions with the numerous horsemen earlier than ourselves upon the road. We ascended and descended continually, over a road of excellent construction. Some of the valleys were very precipitous, and the zigzags were built up of masonry, or cut on the face of the cliff. About sunrise we came out on the table-land of San José, six thousand feet

above the sea level, and here our mules gave out entirely. Ten miles from the town I dismounted, for my poor beast could scarcely get along. Such a weary march it was in the hot sun! Creeping, creeping along, over the dusty road, over the low hills, and through the silent villages. The beautiful purple orchids, for which Costa Rica is famed, hung trailing down from walls and branches; dusty trees thrust their boughs above long garden walls; the grass seemed parched, even beside the artificial streams. Here and there an open gate gave the traveller a momentary view of neat lawns, golden orange trees, and graceful flowers surrounding the whitewashed house of some rich coffee-planter. Here and there was a big mill, whose wooden machinery clanked and cried under the rush of falling water:—a pleasant ride at daybreak, on a fresh animal, but weary and monotonous to me, slowly sweltering along, and leading my worn-out beast by her bridle.

At one o'clock I reached the suburbs of San José, where I waited in a beershop until the others came up. I believe our exertions produced a sensible diminution in the supply of

bitter beer at that suburb: twice the proprietor went out on a forage for fresh liquid. About two o'clock Mr. Jebb and the rest came up, having been compelled, like myself, to lead their animals a great part of the way. We pushed on to the San José Hotel, where, after a breakfast of beefsteaks and porter, of a quality not to be despised even in London, we went straight to bed, from which retirement Mr. Jebb did not emerge until half-past nine next morning, doing eighteen hours of solid sleep.

San José, the capital of Costa Rica, stands six thousand two hundred feet above the level of the sea. The houses are rarely more than two stories in height, for the active volcanoes in the neighbourhood are a continual warning against climbing ambition. The walls are mostly built of adobes, plastered over, as in Nicaragua; but the National Palace is of stone, and by no means an ugly building. All industry looks thriving in San José, and there is no lack of wealth among the people, who mostly spend it in gambling. This is, indeed, the sole amusement, besides church-going; and as to the latter, the upper classes of Costa Rica mostly profess a certain

freedom of thought. How far this may be an affectation imported from Europe or the States I should not care to discuss: had Torialba broken out into violence during our stay, we might have measured justly the value of our friends' infidelity; but any man can boast in the absence of danger. Whatever may be the truth about the "ricos," superstition has its full force among the poorer people, who are noted for their bigotry. Nevertheless, all experience foreshows that irreverence among the high will inevitably shake the faith of the populace at length, and mere prosperity always calms down the zealous fervour of intolerance. The traveller, therefore, will listen with some interest to the sneers and *réchauffé* railleries of Costa Rican society.

Of the great and growing prosperity of the country there can be no question at all. We may reasonably hope that the dangerous instability of the other republics is definitely uprooted here, and that Costa Rica will continue to thrive so long as Torialba and her sister volcanoes will leave the coffee grounds at peace. But I believe there is a cause for the tranquillity of this

country other than mere prosperity—that is the purity of the population. Not in manners or morals!—preserve my reputation from such an assertion!—but in blood. Of negroes there are scarce any in the state, and such as may be met with are held in that position which is best fitting for the black race, gentle inferiority. They are servants, husbandmen, and porters—never officers nor politicians. Of Indians there are scarcely any, at least of tame ones, and the Guatusos and Talamancas keep within their own boundary of forest and mountain.

We stayed in San José for three weeks, continually cheered by hopes of a Frio expedition. On our arrival the subscription list was said to amount to six thousand dollars, and volunteers abounded; but the worthy caballeros had not counted on foreign assistance. Our arrival put them out considerably. It was, we found, one thing to write one's name on a big sheet of paper, with so many ounces after it; quite another to be called on for payment. The volunteers also, who had won much glory in the eyes of the San José beauties, had scarcely anticipated the coming of any blundering "machos,"

who would call on them to keep their word. Three weeks we strove to overcome the difficulties they put before us, and at length, as a last trial, a letter to Colonel Don Juan Estrada was circulated, offering, on our part, to pay the whole expense of the party, if he and the other wealthy volunteers would subscribe, in actual cash, four hundred dollars.* We did not care to put ourselves to the very considerable cost of an expedition consisting of men—and "greasers"

* "*Hotel de San José,*
"*March 24th*, 1866.

"DEAR COLONEL ESTRADA,

"We understand that there is an expedition on foot to cut a passage through the Rio Frio district, and that the preliminary arrangements are confided to your care. As we feel great interest in this exploration, we are willing to undertake a certain part of the expenses; in fact, this is the proposition we make. If the inhabitants of this country, who are personally so much more interested in the question, will raise the sum of four hundred dollars (of the subscription promised before our arrival), we will supply whatever additional funds may be required to carry the exploration through in a safe and complete manner; it being understood *that the Indians are not to be injured* or interfered with except under the most pressing necessity. It is indispensable however that these subscriptions should be raised before next Thursday (29th inst.), as we are anxious to catch the very earliest steamer from Greytown if the expedition should not be organized.

"Trusting that you will succeed in raising the sum we require,

"We remain, dear Colonel Estrada,

"Yours very truly,

"J. G. JEBB, F. BOYLE."

at that—whom we had never seen in our lives, unless they had some slight stake in our success. But these exertions came to nothing. Don Juan Estrada was, I believe, sincerely anxious to make up the party, but all his efforts only realized a hundred and seventeen dollars out of the promised six thousand. Accordingly we shook off the dust of our feet for a testimony against San José, and departed by the Serebpiqui, for health and private affairs alike compelled a quick return to England, if nothing could be done in the Frio matter.

Wishing to do all justice to the Costa Ricans, I must allude to certain excuses which were made to us. It seems very probable that the Frio district is rich in gold—possibly in other minerals—and beyond question the soil there is a hundred per cent. more fertile than on the table-land of San José. The peons, or labouring classes, of Costa Rica are an independent set of fellows, very little corrupted by Indian or negro blood; and it is with some difficulty that they are still retained in the cold mountains, where alone coffee is planted. All the wealthy men of the country are terribly

afraid that if the flat, fertile land round the Frio River were thrown open to emigration by the conquest of the Guatusos, or the dispersion of the foolish superstitions surrounding them, there would be a general movement from the capital into that region, believed by all to be an El Dorado. In consequence we were very coldly looked upon by the planters, who took pains to circulate fabulous speeches from the President and other members of the Government, to the effect that our expedition would be stopped by an armed force. This, however, was contradicted to us by the supposed speakers, although they did not hesitate to give their opinion that the project was evilly regarded by every one. That the stories put in circulation, and the open utterances of their foremost men, prevented the fulfilment of some promises, I admit to be very likely; but the same cause was at work when those promises were made, before our arrival. Professor Seemann put it mildly when he said our expedition was prevented by the "hesitation and timidity of the Costa Ricans."

Of course we heard stories of all classes, mostly more or less awful. Two experiences of

Colonel Cauty, however, are worth recounting. When that gentleman was in command of San Carlos Fort, during the Costa Rican invasion of Nicaragua to cast out General Walker, two of his men deserted, and boldly entered the Frio forests, to cut their way home. In San José they were recognized, and instantly put into separate prisons. Their stories alike asserted they had passed several considerable towns in the jungle, each surrounded with a mud-built wall, over which many thatched roofs could be seen. They travelled only at night, and consequently had not seen a single Indian, though their tracks were very numerous. Many other facts they added, tending to show that the Guatusos are a more powerful people than is generally supposed, and more advanced from barbarism. I give no opinion of the truth of this account, having none to give; but the authorities of San José were satisfied that the deserters had really passed through the Guatuso territory. Colonel Cauty's men also met the savages upon another occasion, and returned to the fort with half-a-dozen arrows still in their flesh. Several specimens of ore were shown to

us, brought down by one or other of these parties; they seemed wonderfully rich in gold.

Saturday is the market of San José, when all the neighbouring towns send their produce to the capital. The principal shopkeepers, who are, of course, the chief men of the country, build booths all round the Plaza, and by dawn of Saturday all manner of showy luxuries are displayed therein. The middle space is reserved for fruit, fish, and vegetables, which are set out on the ground, under care of their growers. From sunrise till noon the Plaza is crammed with buyers and sellers. The ladies of all ranks do their own marketing, and the wives of Senators, daughters of Ex-Presidents, and sisters of Presidents-elect, are all to be seen, basket on arm, and bare-headed, strolling among the fruit baskets, and driving bargains with the market-women. Indians and mestizos are very rare near San José; in fact, we did not see a single aboriginal in Costa Rica. Owing, no doubt, to the purity of their blood, the people of this little republic are as far superior in beauty as in character to their more powerful neighbours. Blonde hair, grey eyes, and red cheeks, are rare

in no class, and many a pretty face may be seen on market-day, scarcely darker or more Spanish-looking than a West-country girl's. Till noon the Plaza is crammed with buyers and sellers, but after that hour the women go to church, or at least disappear, while the men crowd into the tratterias, or spirit-shops. Drinking, I regret to say, is not an uncommon vice in Costa Rica among all classes, far more so than in less moral Nicaragua. The comparative coldness of climate, the presence and example of foreigners, the greater prosperity of the working people, and the encouragement offered by government, all have a share in producing this result; but the natives of course refer it to the first cause alone. San José stands six thousand two hundred feet above the sea, and although the heat is great in the sun, the interior of the houses is always cool, and not seldom downright cold. When lying down, even at midday, the sun outside marking a hundred and ten degrees, we preferred to throw a blanket over our feet.

The great amusement of this country is gambling. Coffee-planting gives the people a command of money which they cannot pos-

sibly spend in a lawful manner, and there are no amusements except the church, the bottle, and the faro bank. A good deal of heresy and infidelity is paraded before foreigners; but the poorer people are intensely devout, and their religion really does give them some occupation. But the evenings must be passed somehow; and as there is little hospitality, except among the foreigners and their set, a faro bank is established at the club, and all the world goes to punt every night. Any one may be asked to take the bank, but whenever a certain high minister of the republic is present, the place is ceded to him, as by right. This gentleman is not a little majestic when setting out the cards, or stroking his long black beard while the bets are making. Fancy Mr. Gladstone in the place of Don "Chico," supported right and left by Lord Clarendon and the Duke of Cambridge, while Mr. Bright and Mr. Disraeli punt fiercely against him! The representatives of these gentlemen in Costa Rica never removed their hats, which were of the genuine chimney-pot fashion. This peculiarity interested us a good deal, because every foreigner in the room—

and we were many in number—uncovered his head on entering. In a few days observation and inquiry solved this mystery. We found that the black silk hat is a sign of lofty pretension on the part of the wearer, and when once put on, is not again removed for the evening. Like the boots in Nicaragua, it marks a caste, not to be assumed without reason, nor lightly to be abandoned. The members of the government, who are all planters and general haberdashers, take the black hat in right of their position socially and politically; while those who are planters *only*, nor keep a shop, rarely venture upon such pretension. When it is absolutely necessary to uncover the head—a necessity which very rarely arises for men of such importance—the hat is held up level with the shoulder, and waved as a banner so long as the occasion endures.

The cathedral of San José is in the usual Renaissance style, ugly, pretentious, and inartistic. The interior was decorated for Easter during our stay, but the Central American taste in such matters runs towards tinsel and wooden dolls. This may be very right in principle, and

the effect upon the natives is good, I believe, really; but a foreigner, whether Protestant or not, finds a difficulty in preserving decent politeness while surveying the scene. We have no wish to sneer at the religion of these people, nor at anything else pertaining to them, but I recognize no rule which should prevent a traveller honestly telling what he saw, or boldly stating the effect such things had upon his mind at the moment. This religion suits these people, of that I feel sure, as no other would. It does not suit me, and I speak of it as a "macho" may, but rendering to our party this justice,—that so long as any Romish eyes could see us, we treated the sights we beheld as reverently as the most pious there.

A screen was placed across the doorway, to protect the magnificence within from the idle gaze of passers-by. On the right of the middle aisle was a line of dolls really superb in their absurdity; many of them represented no character in history, whether sacred or lay,—at least we could not recognize the half of them by any researches. These figures were about eighteen inches high, dressed in silk or satin,

and plenteously spangled. In the middle was a Virgin, lolling her head funnily on one side, and ogling every one who passed the entrance. Beside her was a monk of severe countenance, whom we took for Joseph, as he is generally drawn in that costume. The others may have been angels, or they may have been "supers," or chorus-singers, or anything else, but we fancied them to represent saints and martyrs. At either end of this line stood a priest, to take the money of the faithful, and behind was a scribe, who, I suppose, jotted down the offerings. It was curiously like a bazaar; and we saw the attendant priests seize upon several individuals, and draw the money from them much in the style of pretty actresses at a dramatic fête.

Beyond this, the left aisle was fenced in with a hedge of wild pineapple worked over hurdles. The space enclosed was about twenty feet square. In one corner stood a wooden figure dressed as a monk, with drops of blood flowing down his forehead. The pavement was literally covered with oranges and bananas and yams and calabashes, and flowers of every sort. These things were piled up a foot high, and not an

inch of pavement could be seen. This, we were told, represented the garden of Gethsemane.

Suddenly a cock crowed just beneath our feet, and a hush fell upon the crowd of worshippers who pressed round the prickly hedge. Not a few eyes were turned upon us as this miraculous sound swelled up, either to mark the effect on the heretical mind, or else in dim suspicion that machos might think this performance just a little absurd. But we stood our ground manfully, and looked as grave and awe-struck as any one else. In the silence, the peck of a fowl's beak sounded clear and quick upon the stone pavement, and we soon caught sight of the miraculous bird gobbling maize under a flowery grotto. He seemed likely to get fat before Easter, if rations were always so plentiful with him. I wonder who ate that useful fowl. The rest of the church was adorned in a similar manner, and we heard that half a dozen such tableaux were preparing, to represent other scenes in a book rarely found in Costa Rica. Two or three Virgins there were as black as negresses; whether so painted originally, or darkened with age, I know not. In Nicaragua

Indian and negro virgins are common enough; but, as I have said, there are few aborigines left in this republic except the Guatusos and Talamancas, who have preserved their independence. Colonel Galingo gave Mr. Squier the names of six Indian tribes in Costa Rica, differing entirely from one another, but I have not been able to identify them.

In the centre of the aisle was the far-famed waxen image which is carried round the town at certain great feasts. It lay in its glass case, ready for use in a day or two, a mere pile of linen and spangles and gilding, from which a small ghastly-looking head protruded. We could see very little of the figure, but I believe it is uncovered before going its rounds. All the paintings in the church are of the most miserable character, both as to art and condition. I did not see a single picture in America which was worth the canvas it covered; they are mostly the work of Indian artists, whose main idea is to put on so much colour, so much gilt copper, and so many hundred spangles. There were wondrous representations of shipwreck, with Virgins and angels looking on from the

sky; one or two miraculous escapes, in which the hero is seen mounted upon a saint's shoulders, or drawn up by his hand. Lóts of tinsel, millions of spangles, sheets of dingy copper.

The army of Costa Rica would not make much show in Hyde Park or the Champ de Mars, but it answers very well for the country. Five hundred European troops would certainly put to flight the whole force of the republic, reserves, arrière ban, and all; but the men are, I think, brave enough individually, and quite capable of holding their own against their neighbours. But as an army the force is good for nothing, its sole merit being a wonderful power of march found among most tropical races. The soldiers can neither act together, nor separately as irregular troops, and the officers are, I heard everywhere, by no means heroes. All experience shows that this is the natural result of the "Mahomet's Paradise" system, which Thomas Gage saw in operation here two hundred years ago. The Costa Rican soldiery did indeed perform some feats worthy of any troops in the Filibuster war, but several foreigners pointed out to us that these acts of

bravery took place at the beginning of the struggle, and this fact is rather curious. Certainly its termination was a credit to none of the conquering party. We were told by gentlemen who had watched the whole war, that a very few months more would have seen an end to Costa Rica's interference; and our informants gave their impartial opinion that the honourable victory of Santa Rosa was simply gained because the recruits did not know, or at least did not feel, the danger they were incurring. I myself have seen one or two such instances of ignorant bravery, and, although it seems strange, I believe there is much truth in the theory.

However, the Costa Rican army is quite as efficient as is needed for the tranquillity of its native land. These people are at least as brave as their neighbours, and much more wealthy and intelligent. They would scarcely be so foolish as to oppose any European nation which might have a grievance against them, and the other republics have never yet succeeded in penetrating the mountains and forests which guard the northern frontier. San José is capable of defence against half the continent,

if the soldiers have any generals worthy of the name.

Every evening the garrison is paraded in the plaza, marching out to the music of a very fair band, under the conduct of a wandering German. The uniform is almost as simple as in Nicaragua, but the arms, such as they are, seem serviceable, and well cared for. Mr. Orpheus C. Kerr tells us that the far-famed Mackerel brigade used to dress itself in line against a fence; the garrison of San José, in the absence of an available fence, dresses itself by the coping stones of the pavement, over which every man curls his toes. When this duty is fully performed—in the course of about ten minutes—the officers, in neat uniform, take their places in front of the line, and go over the roll-call, each of the motley heroes answering to his name. Once upon a time, as we were watching this scene, the Host came suddenly out from the cathedral, escorted as usual by a few fiddlers and a crowd of people. Instantly all the line of soldiers dropped on their knees, without waiting for any command. But the officers in the roadway were arrayed in their very best trousers,

and so there was a general run for the pavement. It happened that rain had fallen that morning, and the street was muddy. The colonel or general, whatever he was, did not like to join the other officers who had taken refuge on the dry stones, and he was at a great loss. The procession moved on, and every one in sight was on his knees. The wretched colonel scurried round and round, looking for a dry place, and finding none. Putting dignity in his pocket, he darted hither and thither, frantically searching for a pocket handkerchief with one hand, while waving his sword with the other, until some bystander thrust his own mouchoir of highly-variegated cotton into his hand. Upon which the hero spread it out, knelt upon it, and came to a graceful salute, just as the procession went round a corner and out of sight.

After exerting ourselves for three weeks to organize an exploration among the Guatusos, we lost hope, and made preparations for a march to Greytown by the Serebpiqui. On April 2nd we entertained the few of our acquaintance who had been really in earnest about the expedition. We made them a speech, promising, if possible, to

return in greater force, and bade them a tender farewell. Later in the evening, accompanied by Colonel Estrada and Colonel Cauty, I went to the President-elect, Dr. Castro, to ask what the views of his government would be in regard to an exploration of this river. He wisely declined to bind himself by any premature opinion, but assured us that "his government could not look with indifference upon any attempt to open up the territory of the republic. What assistance it might give to our party he could not say, but certainly the President had neither the wish nor the power to put any impediment whatever in our way." I explained that we desired nothing more, and alluded to the reports circulated in regard to the intended action of the actual president. He observed that to many influential men an exploration of the Frio was distasteful, but repeated his former statement that no President had the power, and that he himself had by no means the will, to obstruct our enterprise. And with this assurance, several times repeated, we left him.

On April 3rd we left San José, a city of many dollars, of much energy, of little virtue, and of no life. Coffee-planting, cock-fighting, faro-

banking, church-going, with a market once in the week, and rum-shops open all day long! A city of dreary, hopeless, spiritless prosperity, a very city of Saint Joseph as these priests represent him. As life rolls on, trade is an aim as honourable as any other; but not such trade as one sees in Central America. This it is which all may sneer at, which has supplied cheap satire from the beginning of the world. I think most men, who have any mind at all, would as soon stand behind a counter as earn their bread in another home-staying business; but let us close the shop sometimes, and raise our minds from the contemplation of the dollars, and be men as our fathers were. This it is which Central America can never do; not, I think, from want of high organization and lofty thought, but from the mere grinding tyranny of idleness and ignorance and accustomed monotony. Surely the "Mahomet's Paradise" is a better life than this; and both are very miserable.

CHAPTER V.

Departure from San José de Costa Rica—Native horsemanship—The padre, his son, and ancestors—Morina—Rumours of the road—The Disengagno—Intense cold—"Doing Savonarola"—Scenes on the Serebpiqui track—Swamps—Forests—Precipices—Rivers—Flower-savannah—San Miguel—Sand cracks—Forest of parasites—Starry flowers—"Pig-apple"—La Vergen—Don Vincenté S—— and his bride—Four hours' steeplechase—Piedragalpa—Our last camp—The Serebpiqui—The Muelle—Costa Rican peons—Fishing—The great rapid—Funny little leon—Colour of the leon—Curious habit—Leon hunting—Mode of seizing prey—Fearful habit of the leon—Second great rapid—The San Juan—Welcome hospitality—Boba—Tuboba—Black snake—Rattlesnake—Corale—Colebra de sangre—Iguanas—Down the San Juan—Greytown again.

On the 3rd of April we left San José de Costa Rica, on the homeward track. Accompanied by Colonel Estrada and another friend, we trotted over to Barba in the dusk of the evening. The ride was enlivened with numerous feats of horsemanship, performed by the former gentleman, who is celebrated throughout Costa Rica for

such skill. Mounted on a three-year old stallion, equipped with a Mexican saddle and a palate-plated bit, he dashed about in a creditable manner, stopping his horse in three yards, picking up stones at a canter, and so on. Most people know the shape of a Mexican saddle. It is raised high before and behind, so that the rider sits as safely as in an arm-chair; but at the same time there are few among us who would care to perform such bold feats as Colonel Estrada showed.

About dusk we reached the village of Barba, and found our way to the house, or rather hotel, of Padre Emmanuele Z——, a priestly character noted on this road for a liveliness of demeanour not usually approved in the Church. The Padre was at Cartago, and in his absence the house was desolate. With much difficulty we procured a few tortillas and beans; but Colonel Estrada was so disgusted with the look of things, that he set back to San José, through the rain and darkness. The Padre's dining-room was blocked with trusses of hay, and there was but one bed available to visitors, the which we cheerfully abandoned to Señor O——, whose legs were

little accustomed to the saddle. I lay down on a bench beside the haystack; Mr. Jebb stretched himself along the table; and Ellis and Sammy found an empty corner. About one in the morning there was a clatter outside, a shouting and knocking. An aged woman brought in a light, and presently entered a tall young fellow, in a condition by no means infrequent among Costa Ricans. After hearing a loud explanation of our presence, this fellow came up to Mr. Jebb and said he was glad to see him. Mr. Jebb gave a savage growl, so the intruder turned to me, and asked, at the top of his voice, whether I was glad to see him. "Sir," he said, "this is the house of my ancestors." "Take him outside, and shoot him!" growled Jebb, savagely. "The house of my ancestors, señor; are you glad to see me?" "No!" I said. "What do you think of Costa Rica? Give me your opinion. You are a stranger. Give me your candid opinion;" and the shameless villain drew a chair close to my head, and sat down glaring at me. "Are there any more of your family in existence?" I asked, solemnly. "I have two brothers; one of them is in the Seminario of Alajuela, and the

other has gone to San Miguel. Should you like to see them?" "Not if they are such confounded asses as you," grumbled Señor O—— from his distant couch. "Now look here," said Jebb, "are you going to shoot this fellow, or am I? If you won't perform this sacred duty, clear the range, and put up the red flag, for the practice is about to open!" So I whooped suddenly in the fellow's ear, and waltzed him into his mother's room, where he called for more liquor.

About an hour after I felt something cold crawl over my hand. With a shout and a jump I reached Mr. Jebb's table, and announced that the snakes were coming out of the haystack. "They're that fellow's ancestors," muttered my friend. So I lay down beside him, and we dozed till morning. It took us a week to rid ourselves of the fleas unwillingly carried away from Padre Z——'s.

April 4th.—Bad luck at the very outset of our journey. One of the mules was taken with moriña in the night. This curious disease is confined to that hybrid, nor is it infectious. No one seems to know exactly the cause of it; but the soft, tender lump on the belly, which is the

earliest symptom, looks like a rupture of the intestines. Whatever be its cause or its course, moriña is quite incurable, and within twenty-four hours death ensues. We had met with it before in Chontales, but it is not so common there as in the higher table-lands. Our journey was much delayed by this accident, as another animal must instantly be sought. About eight o'clock we started at a walk for the Disengagno, the next stage on this Serebpiqui track. The guide we took from Barba—who was to lead us slowly to a certain hut, where our own mozo would rejoin the party with a new mule—told awful stories of this far-famed road. Before narrating what really did befall us, I will mention the tales and rumours of San José and Barba about the Serebpiqui route.

The river of this name is one of the tributaries of the San Juan, of which I spoke much in the earlier chapters of this book. It is a shallow mountain stream, full of rapids, snags, rocks, sharks, tigers, and alligators; and the forests on its banks are celebrated for their beauty and wildness. The road is good so far as the Disengagno, which is the limit of the San José table-

land, but from that point no attempt whatever has been made to clear the forest. Some years since government took the matter up, and talked largely of opening a route to the Atlantic coast, which is now blocked by Guatusos and Talamancas, and perhaps other wild tribes of whom little is known; but, as I have said, there are many opposed to the enterprise, and the Serebpiqui road never advanced beyond the Disengagno. Past that point the land descends suddenly to the flat plain of the San Juan, and the character of the country is swampy. Many streams, mostly very swift and precipitous, intersect the district, but none of them are navigable. When the government of Costa Rica proclaimed its intention of cutting a road, a considerable number of squatters advanced before the exploring party, and settled themselves upon the lower land, whose fertility surpassed all expectations. These men found their way through the forest, and cleared several districts, but the government work was abandoned on the execution of President Mora, and the communication with San José has since been carried on over the same forest track by which the squatters first came down. In San José they

told us that the mud was, in most places, deep enough to smother a mounted man, if he wandered three feet from the long "ford," if I may so call it, discovered by the first explorers. They said that the rivers flowed between precipices as steep as a wall, and deep as the towers of the cathedral; that without leaning beyond the line of one's boot in the saddle, the eye could see a sheer descent of a thousand feet, without a tree to break the fall; that the tigers of the Serebpiqui were more savage than in any other part, and they are dangerous everywhere in America; that the lions, elsewhere so stupid and cowardly, would here attack a traveller in broad daylight. What did not they tell us? Flying giants, and ogres, and quicksands, and croquemitaines abounded on this fatal road.

At a dirty hut, inhabited by two of the ugliest children I ever saw, we waited for our mozo with the fresh mule. Hour after hour passed as we lay dozing on a grey hill-side before the hut. The sky was dim and sultry, with a bank of pale clouds along the horizon. Swell beyond swell of bamboo-covered hills lay behind towards Barba. The long grey grass rustled round us in

faint breaths of breeze; a flock of little yellow birds chirped and glanced from berry to berry among the boughs of a pollard fruit-tree hung with a drapery of scarlet creeper,* which swept the ground with tangled blossom. We lay on a massive trunk, fired many a year ago, and crumbling slowly in the long grass. Millions of big ants hurried by in endless lines of foragers, and a sparkling beetle glanced out from time to time in hesitating course. There was a deep hole below, from which a branch had long since been torn; it was veiled with moss and fern. Down there in the darkness lay a mighty spider, fat and sprawling and spiked over with rough fur. I lay and watched his ugliness for a while, then a sudden knife-thrust brought him wriggling up to unaccustomed daylight. How many bright beauties had those poisonous jaws devoured? What sort of devil's alchemist was he to transform their loveliness into such ugliness as this? Surely, if the butterfly have a soul and consciousness, the bitterest pang she feels in so dying must be in the thought that her airy beauty will be

* I noted this scarlet and yellow creeper often upon the Serebpiqui, but not elsewhere. At Sierra Blanca I secured a great quantity, but it died with the hardships of the way.

smothered in such foulness. There are many spiders in this world, very many spiders, big and little, and they never sleep, as do the poor butterflies.

Hour passed on after hour. The sun broke through the hot mist, and peeped down along the hill-side; the ugly children overcame their first awe of us, and ventured on a game at play. Then a white bull came to stare with gentle black eyes; then two green parrots passed above our heads, flashing crimson in each flutter of their wings. Afterwards came a whole army of yellow and orange butterflies, which gathered round a pond.* A solitary vulture floated up from the valley, and clumsily lit upon a tree, where he sleeked his reeking feathers and dozed after the late meal. A little armadillo slinked below the trees, and was spied out by the dogs. And then we fell asleep and watched no more.

About two o'clock the guide appeared, mounted

* These butterflies, male and female no doubt, are constantly seen in flights by the banks of ponds and rivers. I could not find the object of these assemblies, which are not made by any other species. They flutter together in masses of two or three hundred, and the mule may put his foot upon them before they will stir. I have sometimes fancied they are feeding on some putridity which may have lain there. The proboscis has been outstretched in every one I have examined when so congregated.

on a very pretty little chesnut mule unprovided with a bridle. We pushed on at once for the Disengagno, which was reached just at nightfall. Through such a lovely mountain forest we made our way! Grey and shrub-clothed rocks overhung the mossy path, and a canopy of delicate fern-fronds stretched above our heads. Here and there was a mountain-palm or a prickly cane. Every shrub was decked with flowers, and a garden of broad leaves lay under foot. The trees were of gigantic size, and boughs and trunk were draped with ferns and orchids, the latter in full flower. Adown the precipitous valleys, and beside the hidden streams, tangled thickets of bamboo-cane drooped their fleecy crowns. A thousand strange creepers twisted themselves from branch to branch, or hung down towards the rocky path; flowers of every hue sunned themselves in each open glade, and even the dim shadows could boast some pale and sunless blossom—among which a cup-like flower, balanced on the topmost twig of a large-leaved plant, was most frequent.

Just at sunset we reached the Disengagno, where is a shed built by the former cutters of the

road. It is now falling rapidly to ruin, under the attacks of age and of reckless travellers. Half the roof is already down, and not a few of the props and rafters have been hacked up for firewood; for the cold is dreadful here after nightfall, as we had been warned in San José. Three travellers we found already under shelter; they were taking a drove of mules and young horses into the forest. At once all set to work building a fire, for a chilly mist already began to rise from the deep and rocky valleys which descend precipitously from this high land. When the big pile, made of broken rafters and half-burnt pillars, was in a blaze, we sat round it, cooking, and at the same time listening to awful accounts of the road discussed in a corner by our mozos and the three travellers. Then we lay down on the wet ground, pushed our feet almost into the fire, and dozed off.

Towards morning the cold became so bitter that sleep was out of the question. I got up to put more wood on the smouldering logs, and, being stupid with cold and sleeplessness, I walked right into the great fire, and staggered across it much more heroically than Savonarola. Pre-

sently the dull grey dawn spread itself through the mist and dampness, and the natives staggered to their feet, blue and helpless with cold. We had to saddle our own mules, and pack up ourselves, for the guides were really unable to move their fingers, though they did their very best to thaw themselves.

April 5th.—Within one hundred yards of the Disengagno, the downright, real, orthodox "Serebpiqui ride" begins. Through the little rock-strewn clearing we trotted gaily, crushing under our feet a thousand forms of tender loveliness; beating down the dew-gemmed ferns, trampling on the scarlet creepers, and breaking off the long wet branches, starred with berries, which drooped into our eyes. On the other side we struck a water-course, which the guide proceeded to descend. No one of the party said a word, but we rammed down our hats, tucked in our feet, and followed the leader. At the bottom, Sammy, in a very quaking voice, asked the guide if the road improved further on. He gave a grim laugh: "This is nothing, niño! We shall come to the mud soon." And presently we came to the mud.

Now I am not going to detail our progress in

this Serebpiqui ride; I could not if I would, and certainly nothing is further from my wish. The wisest thing a man can do, after a good run in which he has risked his neck, is to hold his tongue and attempt no descriptions. A scene one may pick out here and there; a pretty bit of riding, a cropper of one's own or of a friend, a "plucky thing" of one's rival, or a pert jeer of the heart's adored; but as to steady description of the run—detailing it minute by minute and point by point—Heaven save us from those misguided wretches who have a habit of doing this! Many a pleasure, ay, and many a virtue, do we owe to Leicestershire, but for nothing should the world be more grateful than for that salutary edict of later years—No hunting talk before the first cigar. Good faith! what have we not suffered in former times! What martyrdoms of dumb politeness from men whom we had never seen after the first five minutes of the pace! For slow stupidity, commend me to an Oxford wine party! For stupidity still lower, take an Oxford wine party during the winter months! For the very lowest point of stupidity and slowness of which this creation is capable, I will back

—against the whole world of cripples—an Oxford wine party after a day with "the old Brewery."

But a picture here and a scene there is pleasant enough to hear of. We are all heroes, of course, and one man is just as good as another, but in spite of our age, life is not yet *quite* uniform. One good fellow performs a feat which might have fallen to another; both would have done it equally well—or ill—probably; but as one alone has the glory, the other must console himself with a thought, "Qu'il en fût bien capable." We chanced to pass down the Serebpiqui, and we saw some scenes which appear to me worth painting, if I have the power to do it.

After leaving the water-course, which was rather a startling road for weakly minds, we came out upon a bamboo-covered swamp, in which the big trees stood few and naked. Their great branches met overhead, and shut us in a dim shadow. The brown and rough-scaled parasites hung straightly down, without a leaf or blossom to deck out their nakedness; pale bamboos stretched their whip-like heads above our path. Boldly Mr. Jebb went forward into the

unknown swamp. Whoop! Splutter! Confusion! His mule has sunk into that treacherous mud, and he himself is in up to the waist.

Out again, and up the hill, to avoid this swamp, which was impassable. The ascent was at an angle of 60°, and road, of course, there was positively none, for no human being had ever passed that way. Slipping, staggering, the mules climbed up, and we lay flat along the saddle to avoid the overhanging branches. Suddenly Sammy's beast rolled over, falling down the hill-side until stopped by a prickly trunk. Touched by the poor boy's piercing cries, and the sight of his blood-bedabbled face, we waited to pick him up. One after another our animals fell, seating themselves upon the ground, with their legs gathered under them like rabbits. Then down the other side, where the angle was so steep that we held on to the crupper to save ourselves. Into the swamp again, plunging, labouring, falling, until we struck another watercourse.

Then along the great landslips, where we struggled in single file by the brink of a long, smooth precipice, which stretched down a thou-

sand feet below, without a tree to break the fall. Sharp roots of inverted trees, great snags and pointed rocks, alone protruded through the soil, and stood there, naked and terrible, to affright the awe-struck traveller.

Then for a few yards we took the track again, and here my mule pitched down upon her head and turned a perfect somersault. Fortunately I fell aside, and escaped with a bruised ankle and a bloody face. Sammy down again twice, and in an agony of terror.

Down the wall-like precipice to a river. Such a lovely, rock-bound, foaming cataract of a river! Great tree-ferns, forty feet in height, stretched their wet fronds above the stream. Huge red trunks, half undermined by floods and foam, pressed themselves together along the banks, and arched their branches across the water. Broad leaves lay dabbling in the stream, and the green crests of the rock quivered to the seething beat of rapid water. The vegetation of the banks was that of fairyland: neither in Africa nor in Asia did I ever see such grace and delicacy of foliage. The flowering shrubs and creepers were twisted in sheets of colour, and the spray of the

river dewed them over with eternal jewels. Ah, the wild Eden that it was! An Eden unsullied by man's foot, still bearing the nameless flowers of the unknown world. Ah! to exchange once more these fogs and wearinesses for the still tenderness of that enchanted land! To take once more that mad ride down the Serebpiqui; to feel again the thrill of fierce excitement; to see the flowers, and the palms, and the giant trees, and all the fairy loveliness of Nature; again to feel the fierce heat of the sun, and the cool dews of tropic night; ah! on this dreary winter's day, it seems to me one might well give half a dull life for such a pleasure.

Plunging and rearing, our mules are forced into the stream, while the rocky banks resound with shouts of wild excitement. From boulder to boulder we force our way, slipping on the rounded stones, swimming through the deeper pools, resting for a moment in the lea of the great rocks. The splashing, and shouting, and breathless laughter, are heard above the din of falling water. "Who's that down?" "Only a native, sir!" Whoop! Hurroo! And so we reach the other side.

All through the morning we rode a match of which our lives were the stake, and about three o'clock reached Sierra Blanca, where we lunched. A league from this place we left the forest region for a time, and entered the loveliest stretch of "flower-prairie" that the fancy of man could conceive. Here and there was a great tree, standing by itself or in company with one or two others, and looking as if planted by man's hand. On every side of us, underfoot, overhead, and on either hand, were piles and stacks of blossom. They were heaped up as I never saw them before or since. Solid masses of leaf and flower, twisted and twined, of a hundred different species and colours, stood up twenty feet high all round, leaving smooth green alleys of grass between, by which we rode along. All the conservatories of England could not have supplied such wild extravagance of flowers, nor all the landscape-gardeners of the world such dreamy order of confusion.

In the midst of this wild garden was a shed, rapidly falling to pieces. Beneath it the baggage was piled while we took lunch under the shadow of an old-world tree, canopied over

with scarlet and yellow creeper, haunted with scorpions and hairy beetles. After an hour we mounted again for San Miguel. With every step our road became more dangerous. Again and again the mules fell, and we were quite powerless to hold them up. One injudicious touch of the bridle might have cost a life, or in many places the lives of all our party. Swimming rivers, climbing precipices up or down, wading recklessly through seas of mud, with a knowledge that the very next step might take one overhead, torn by crooked thorns, swept headlong from the saddle by low drooping creepers, bruised against cliffs by the desperate boring of our mules—that was indeed a wild ride we had to San Miguel; it was a steeplechase prolonged for ten hours.

About dusk we struck a clearing of sugar-cane and banana, and the light green of their leaves shone like a jewel in the dark forest setting. Beyond this outpost of cultivation lay the village of San Miguel, a little paradise lost in this trackless forest, and forgotten by the Costa Rican world. People live there healthy and contented, holding small intercourse with

other spheres, and happy to be left alone with their business and their pleasure, their sugar-canes and tigers. Could one lead a better life than this? From the door of one's log-built house, seated upon a low, green hill, to look round upon the fields one's arms have cleared, or to peer into the steely forest, following the panther's trail. Gentlemen who believe in "missions," do you know a better mission than this? There is work to do here, work of to-day and to-morrow; the tobacco to weed, the cane to cut, the cattle to brand or track. I think the Serebpiqui squatter is wiser and healthier than to talk of missions. Perhaps he is wrong in his barbarous freedom; but how shall it be proved to him that he has no right to be happy? Shall we tell him he must die? Why so he must, he says; but his son is a tall fellow, and he will worthily succeed to the cane patch and the old tiger-spears. Shall we talk to him of the progress of the world, of the great "results of time," of our intellect, which swells up towards the heaven? He might say, "Are you so happy, then? And yet I am taller and healthier than you." And what

would be the answer our age could give to that? A Spaniard once told me that the man who kills a tiger deserves better for this world—not to say for the world to come—than one thousand curates. Let us shut our eyes hard and tight, lest we fancy that the sight of a San Miguel tigrero will do more good to one's soul and body than could all the rectors and curates of England, headed by the bench of bishops and backed by the goodness of all stupidity. Such are the folk of this generation who have the courage to be men, nor seek either to be apes or angels.

We put up at a log-built hut, crowning the top of a green hill, dotted with patches of banana and sugar-cane. Here and there a solitary tree —the giant of the fallen forest—had been spared in the general clearing, and now threw long sunset shadows upon the grass. Slender nests of moss hung tossing fron its branches, and the "oropendulas" fluttered their yellow and purple wings, and cawed among the leaves. The hill-side was dotted with groups of sleek oxen, which stared lazily as we trotted by. Two wild-looking squatters passed before us, hurrying forward a drove of mules and horses, with spears and

unearthly cries. The slender mountain grass burnt redly in the sunset, and the shadowy forest quivered in a haze of orange light. The palings of the hut were surrounded by tall lime trees, spangled with golden fruit, and the grass was strewn with fallen oranges. Behind was a plantation of cacao.

The squatter received us kindly enough, and ventured to offer a bottle of home-made aguadiente, knowing himself safe, in this secluded clearing, from the stern excise of Costa Rica. After a merry supper and much "shikari talk" with our stalwart host, Mr. Jebb and I went to bed upon the flaying-block outside the house, on which blood-stained couch we slept the sleep of men tired out in mind and body. About midnight I awoke, roused by the chilly dew. Just overhead the round, white moon was climbing up through thin-drawn clouds, and fleecy shadows passed along the grass. The white light glinted on the grey thatched roof, on the smooth hill-side, on the eternal foliage of the distant forest. The thousand voices of tropic night joined in a pleasant murmur, broken from time to time by the shrill cry of a tiger-cat or the howl of a

sleepless monkey. Who could look on a scene like that without some faint surge of romantic thought, some dream of what might be, some hope, some effort? But with the first sun-ray it dies out again: for our generation there is no escape from the weariness of light. We dream a dream of the night, and with the morning it is forgotten.

April 6th.—Half an hour after dawn we were again upon the road, leaving behind us at San Miguel one of the natives who had hitherto followed our track. He was a fine, tall fellow, lusty and loud-voiced, but his feet were frightfully sand-cracked. I never saw so bad a case, though the disease is common among all races that walk barefoot. This poor fellow's feet were quite dreadful to see, but he had kept up with us hitherto without a murmur, not even asking for a mount upon any of the mules the others were driving. We left him with regret, for it was pleasant to hear his loud, hearty voice ringing through the deep arcades of the forest, and he was ever the first in and the first out of a dangerous place.

From San Miguel to La Virgen the road was

much better; that is to say, the mud was not generally above our mules' knees. Here and there the close-woven forest was broken by lovely bits of savannah, strewn over with copses and flowers and fern-clad rocks, through which we made way pleasantly. About midday we entered a piece of forest in which the parasites were knitted together more densely than could be believed. They were twisted into every shape, from the likeness of a vast cable to that of a corkscrew forty feet long. This latter was caused, I suppose, by the decay and rotting of the tree round which the creeper had formed itself; but having grasped some other trunk, it could stand without support when its first victim was crushed to death. Some there were carefully and evenly plaited across one another on a giant trunk, and others which had twisted their support into the shape of such a pillar as Raphael gave to the "Beautiful Gate." Nearly all were in flower, but mostly above the tree-tops. Up towards the scarce-seen sky sparkles and wreaths of blossom could be seen, blue and orange and scarlet. A few there were which flowered near the ground, and conspicuous among these was a

large crimson star, with purple centre, which grew almost at our feet. No leaves did it bear, but trails of naked stem, and here and there a five-rayed star of purest colour. From point to point the flower was six or seven inches across, and between each long petal was a shorter ray, hidden towards the centre by a purple cup.* It was exquisitely beautiful. Another creeper, which is, I find, known in England, bore a small wax-like flower of yellow, and a seed as large as a crab. This is a favourite food for wild pigs, javalinos and savalinos, nor does the traveller despise it by any means. When a hunter catches sight of the yellow "pig-apple," he knows he has not far to go for game.

After passing one river and many swift streams, we reached a beautiful savannah, studded with neat houses and big trees, which surrounded the dwelling of the great Serebpiqui proprietor, Don V—— S——. We had a letter of introduction to this gentleman, but he was from home, and so, after consultation, we decided to push on for Piedragalpa the same evening. There are two persons in this world

* I brought many roots of this creeper home, but they all died.

whose position has never roused a spark of envy in my mind—the Prince of Wales and that wretched Kling who plays a worn-out "tom-tom" about the West-End streets. At La Virgen I added to these two the pretty wife of Don V—— S——, who stood in her doorway as we pulled up. If she be contented with the large cattle-station in life to which Providence has called her, well and good; but were I a woman I should not envy her. On the other hand, suppose she feels a thirsty longing to see her friends and family again? Eve might have been happy on the Serebpiqui, but Eve was not born in San José de Costa Rica. Contented or not, the bride of Don Vincente is a fixture, for he would scarcely be such a fool as to let her get over the road again. Perhaps he is a happy man, the Don. Verily, no gay Lothario of the capital is likely to pursue this prey to her secluded grot, and the husband must have her all to himself to do what he please with. The worst of this view is that the situation can be exchanged, for his wife has *him* upon the same terms. On the whole, I do not think I can conscientiously envy either of the pair.

From La Virgen the road to Piedragalpa was downright awful; even the mountains of the Disengagno were easy riding compared with it. Every instant a mule was down or stuck fast, but so wonderful is the quickness and sagacity of these animals, that we had not a strained sinew among us. Great danger was caused by the necessity of travelling in single file, and all close to the guide. Several times we jumped off, fearing to be swept all together down the precipice by the headlong overthrow of the leading mule. We had some very neat fencing over fallen trees and deep ravines. My mule was exceedingly clever, but it was a terrible steeplechase. Four hours we were in passing to Piedragalpa, a distance of three miles at the furthest.

At length we rode into a large clearing, in the centre of which stood a solitary log-house, without a sign of cultivation near it. Groups of half-wild cattle were browsing round, or standing lazily in the little stream which babbled through, half overshadowed with long weeds and flowering shrubs. Lonely enough the house looked, standing in the midst of that great grey expanse, without a sign of human presence. By

the edges of the forest stood black charred trunks and white chipped stumps of trees; but the centre was smooth and bare, except for one mighty grey bole crowned with a world of leaves. All down the stem were mud-built nests of savage black wasps, hanging in wart-like bowls ten feet across.

The ambitious German who had cleared this large space for future fortune was resting from his labours at a countryman's house, and condoling with the owner thereof, who lived a life even more lonely than his own. He had left his household gods to protect the property; he had also left a strong door and a stout lock. But after a council we decided it was too late for further travel, as we had already made half a stage beyond the usual halt; and, besides, we were tired out in body, and not a little wearied in mind. So we selected a corner of the clearing where a big tree had been left standing, and made preparations for the camp, which we knew would be our last in Central America. Then the mules were unsaddled while we strolled into the forest in search of supper. Here I saw the lovely Costa Rican "bird of Paradise." We

made a gigantic fire of some hairy, prickly shrub, and a few of the charred logs lying round; and as evening drew on we cooked our parrots, talking of past perils and of those still to come. It was our last camp; and if indeed the scene were not so lovely as those we had lately viewed, it had still its own wild charm of loneliness and silence. As we lay round the fire after our evening bath, the dusk settled swiftly down upon the clearing, and a warm mist began to wrap us in. No sound could be heard except the crackle of the blaze and the long sigh of the forest. The grey grass softly swayed, and in the branches overhead night birds began to flutter. The oropendulas had clustered thickly around their nests,* and their querulous cawing had ceased, except from time to time a sudden croak, which roused a chorus drowsily. With a rush and a swing the great beetles dashed out from their holes in the tree-trunk, and circled over the meadow in search of prey. Then darkness fell thickly down; the big fire burnt and glowed upon the leaves above our head, and sent

* The Oropendula builds a nest of moss and grass about two feet long, in the form of a bag.

out long red rays into the dusky meadow. Black and stormy clouds were gathering along the low horizon of forest, and thunder began to mutter faintly over the track we had lately come. Lonely and savage a camp will always seem, but in forest or in desert I never beheld a scene so wildly, solemnly sad, as that great colourless clearing bounded by ghostly forest, in which our fire seemed a speck. It was a worthy spot for our last melancholy camp.

April 7th.—Set forth at dawn on the final stage of our land journey. The road was as dangerous as before, but the great quantity of fallen timber which we could jump made it more amusing. On nearing the Muelle, or place of embarkation, signs of cultivation became more frequent, but the squatters' houses were always hidden in the forest. After passing several small savannahs cleared by Nature's hand, we suddenly struck the rocky banks of the Serebpiqui, at a spot where the water was dashing down in a thousand whirlpools. "Is that the rapid where Mrs. T—— and her party were drowned?" we asked. "Oh, no!" laughed the guide. "That one is lower down. What you see here is nothing—

nothing!" Our guide was a man with great natural genius for consolation.

About twelve o'clock we reached our destination, a lovely clearing, planted here and there with copses of flowering shrubs. It was the residence of a German squatter, who could and did enjoy a scene of wild beauty such as the wealthiest could not realize in Europe. I have exhausted my stock of epithets in describing the glory of the Serebpiqui track, and of our host's abode I will only say that it had the very loveliest flowers, mightiest trees, and neatest lawn I ever saw together in all my travels—and it was tended by Nature alone. Our host himself was a wild-looking fellow, who had almost forgotten his native tongue. He was kindly enough, but evidently ill at ease, from a consciousness of half-forgotten obligations of politeness and civilisation. He gave himself an immense amount of trouble to show how far he was superior to the natives in mind; really for an acquaintance of six hours it seemed scarcely worth while.

Having engaged a canoe for Greytown at the peculiarly cheap price of forty dollars, we dismissed our guides and mules, thereby bidding

farewell to Costa Rica. A backsheesh of a quarter of an "ounce" caused them the most intense glee, which they manifested in fervent, but by no means servile, wishes for our safe arrival. They were both manly, stalwart fellows, and their bold riding had given us considerable respect for them. As I have said before, the lower classes of Costa Rica are almost white, and they show many virtues quite unknown upon the other side the San Juan. They are brave, frugal, and patient, but the tendency towards drinking is yearly more apparent among all classes; or at least so we were told. Property is very secure; robbery with violence being almost unheard of, much in contrast with the state of things in Nicaragua. Upon the whole, I suppose that of all the colonies of Spain now free, Costa Rica is the only one which can show a history of prosperity from the very Independence-day. Revolutions of course have taken place, but civil war never. The intelligence of the peons is too great to be easily led astray, and there is scarcely any one who has not something to lose by anarchy. In no country of the world probably is wealth so much distributed as in this

republic. There are many considerable fortunes among the planters, and a few really large, but the working people also have participated in the sudden flood of wealth; and what we call the "dangerous classes,"—those whose position is constantly shifting, who have no past and no future—are not known in Costa Rica. Therefore it is that revolutions are so sudden and so effectual; every one votes for order and expedition. In Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras the exact reverse is the rule; three-fourths of the people vote for disorder and civil war, or at least are not opposed to it; they have scarcely any of them aught to lose, and not a few know they must gain,—even if they die.

In the afternoon we entered a canoe, and paddled a mile or two down the river to a hut appointed as the rendezvous for the boatmen our host was seeking. We heard that the rapids were very numerous and violent now, in consequence of drought, but for the same reason there was less danger to life. Before reaching the hut we shot one long fall, where the clear water raced and tumbled furiously; but our German was well acquainted with the channel, and Ellis,

the only novice among us, sat like a hero. In the very worst seasons the most murderous rapids have one open channel through which a brave man, trained to the paddle from childhood, and knowing the river thoroughly, can pass a canoe; but these open sluices shift constantly, and on a river like the Serebpiqui it is necessary to watch without ceasing, and to question every canoe-man on his return from a descent. However skilful a boatman might be, he never could live through a mile of this river unless acquainted with its every current and channel.

On landing at the rendezvous, we were greeted by four or five black tiger-dogs, and a pack of clumsy bright-eyed puppies, which jumped upon us in the most engaging manner. The house was a log structure, inhabited by kittens, pigs, scorpions, and cockroaches; besides the proprietor. The business carried on there was india-rubber melting, and great blocks of gum, consisting of forty or fifty thin sheets, run together by sun-heat, and shaped in big bricks, were piled up before the door. On arrival we found the host sorting his "rubber" with a wary eye

and ready feet, crushing the scorpions and venomous spiders as they wriggled from between the sheets. Behind the house was an unfinished clearing blocked with flowers and twining canes. Vast trees lay prostrate among the oozy tangle, like the overthrown angel "stretching many a rood;" others stood bare and naked, waiting for the fire to be kindled at their roots. Bananas and tobacco had been sown in the drier spots, and their broad leaves spread out above the tumbled mass of weeds. Mr. Jebb and I sat on a fallen trunk, and watched the sunset clouds piled up above the forest, wave over wave of crimson. A distant sparkle of the river, flashing in its rocky bed, showed us the beginning of the great rapid which had whirled many into black death, and its low, dull gurgle reached our ears. And before us was the mysterious forest, through which we had lately ridden, and its dim murmur mingled with the sound of dashing water. So we sat upon the trunk, and discussed the question of parliamentary reform.

The crushed scorpions were lying about too thickly inside the hut for comfortable rest, so we lay down in the clearing. The mosquitoes were

downright homicidal. At dawn the squatter roused us, bleeding at every pore, and we went down to the misty river for a swim and for breakfast. Fishing is lively sport in Central America wherever a hook is thrown in, but the beautiful Serebpiqui is famed above other rivers for the excellent sport it affords to any one Isaac-Waltonly disposed. In a very few moments we had caught three big silver-scaled bream, besides one that I shot, and two that escaped. We saw several rainbow-hued guapote, the most delicious as the most beautiful fish that swims, but they would not take a bait this time.

April 8th.—After a hurried breakfast we took our places in the canoe ; two keen-eyed squatters in the bows, then Ellis and Sammy, then Jebb and I ; all four of us jammed up so tightly that we could only use our outside arms ; in the stern sat the steersman. Gently we paddled to the head of the great rapid. The quick current quickened—quickened—raced—whizzed and beat back in furious surges. One glance at that great agony of water had dizzied the strongest brain. Like an arrow we shot down, grazing huge rocks, dashing down the falls, shipping

the hissing swirls of foam. On an even keel, too quick for breath, we darted along the furrowed channel. One touch of a rock or snag, though light as a finger blow, one inch of overbalance, and we had never emerged alive from that long writhing hell of water. No wonder poor Mrs. T—— lost her head here, after such trials of nerve as she must have undergone in the land journey.

Just after passing the great rapid we saw a funny little scene. Looking down one of the clear swift reaches of the river, I caught sight of an animal on the left bank. My right arm being jammed against my side, so as to be useless, I called Mr. Jebb's attention to the spot, but before he fired we were almost abreast, and had a good view of the beast. It was a pretty little lion, probably about one year old. His fore-paws rested on a rock, and he stood upon hind-legs, spitting at us like a household cat. Such a charming picture he made, the shaded grey rocks defining his chesnut coat. His beautiful green eyes were distended with childish passion, and he showed a gleam of milk-white teeth between his tight-drawn lips. The

spiteful little beauty was about the size of a large pointer dog.

Like most American animals, the puma, or lion, differs exceedingly in colour according to its locality. Even in Nicaragua, we saw very various shades of brown and chesnut in their skins. This was the only Costa Rican specimen we met wild, and his coat was singularly bright. The black puma, frequently called the black leopard, has now become very rare, though we are told it was once the greatest plague hacienderos had to deal with. Since its disappearance the jaguar, or tigre, an animal quite as destructive and dangerous, has multiplied exceedingly. It is said that the tigre and the black lion or leopard will not live in the same neighbourhood, but, like the black snake and the rattlesnake, will fight until one race is exterminated or driven off. The tiger at least would not object to this convention; he is, I believe, larger than his antagonist, and certainly would hold his own against any animal in the world for courage and ferocity.*

* To confess the truth, I think the whole story of the black puma very apocryphal. Passe pour le tigre; but the mere confusion of names—puma and leopard, for one animal, which is especially

Most people at all interested in the subject are perfectly well acquainted with the form of the puma, which is much the same from end to end of his extensive range. Though every individual part is beautiful, he does not, on the whole, seem graceful, from the disproportionate length of body, the smallness of head, and the giant size of the feet. His head is strangely little, and more flattened than with other carnivora; the eyes very large, and with a wild, green light in them, quite different from the calm dignity expressed by the true lion or the tiger. Indeed, the puma is curiously excitable, very inquisitive, but at the same time cowardly, full of play and fun even to old age. He is easily tamed, and if not teased, will be a safe pet to have about a house where there are no children, except of course at feeding time. More than any animal I ever saw, the puma

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distinguished from the "black tiger"—must make one doubt his existence. Evidently a black tigre must be much like the Asiatic black leopard; but why should a puma be spotted? That by a freak of Nature a lion might be black, of course I do not deny; but a species so often heard of ought to be better known. The black puma appears and disappears in various localities, and is much more perplexing than the black tiger.

reminded me of the "jolie fillette" of French novelists—her ways, her selfish playfulness, and ever-ready treachery when vexed. It is difficult to say whether the "mignonne" exists, but a puma's spirit transfused into a dainty little human body would well realize that French notion of a woman. Perhaps the notion is correct; few of us are competent to dispute.

The size of the paw is another peculiarity of the puma. Though he is not more than two-thirds of a jaguar's dimensions, the two trails cannot be distinguished by any difference in size, nor in depth of impression. But there is a curious speciality of the former animal which enables the hunter to identify the beast he is pursuing. The bold and fearless jaguar plants his foot firmly on the earth, careless whether the next stride shall take him into a circle of foemen or within leaping distance of his prey. The puma, suspicious and crafty, creeps over the ground with his big paws carefully placed, and his head crouched down between the shoulders. This mode of progression naturally causes a strain upon the paws at the moment they are lifted from the ground, and the consequence

is that a little ridge of soil is formed behind each slot. At first a quick eye is needed to see this difference, but the experienced bushman will read it at a glance.

The destruction of jaguars is much greater annually than that of pumas; and for a simple reason. When the traveller meets the former in the forest, the chances are about equal whether he will charge or not; in any case it will not be fear that restrains him. But the puma must be tracked, and surrounded, and wounded, before he will stand his ground, though we must admit he makes a fine fight when brought to bay. The tigre springs with his paws wide apart, as we see so admirably drawn upon the Nineveh bas-reliefs; but the leon, in nine cases out of ten, crosses his paws in leaping. For this reason, and for the others I have mentioned, pumas are generally left alone. Provided with his two spears, and supported by the comrade behind him, the tigrero really runs little danger, though there are few among the bravest of us who would have nerve for the business. That is to say, he runs little danger if the tiger behaves properly, and leaps with his

paws apart, as he almost always does. But once or twice in a lifetime the tigrero meets his fate in the shape of a monstrous tiger which leaps with paws crossed like a puma—and then comes the tug. With a pat of his mighty arm he snaps the spear-shafts, and falls unharmed upon the crouching hunter. Then the man behind comes up with his heavy sword, and a hand-to-hand fight begins over the body of the spearsman. But sometimes the man behind does *not* come up, and the poor tigrero dies.

When a puma is brought to bay no use is made of the spears, at least not in general, though we heard of instances: the Indian hunter, confident in his strength of arm and skill with the machete, goes boldly up and provokes the spring. Standing firmly in front, he splits the animal's skull in mid air, and leaps nimbly backwards, leaving his machete in the wound. It is a dangerous game, but so their forefathers killed pumas, and so do they. A man seldom has two blows; if the first fail to kill he is overthrown in an instant, and the machete is an awkward weapon for such a combat.

The lion and tiger, the puma and the jaguar, differ as much in their habits as in their appearance or character. Mr. Byam had, I think, an opportunity of seeing the latter seize his prey, and he describes it admirably. In attacking a large bullock, the tiger rested one paw upon the shoulder-blade, while he grasped the muzzle with the other, bending it down to the chest. By this means he not only broke the animal's neck, but also filled the jugular vein, which was instantaneously bitten through. I saw a lion kill a dog in a very different manner, but in both cases it was the jugular that was aimed at, and not, as in true lions, the back or side of the head. In this instance the beast sprang at a dog, rested one paw lightly on the shoulder, and drew the other sharply across its neck, severing the arteries in three distinct cuts, which were clean as if made with a razor. The puma has also a horrible habit of dogging a traveller: if it see a man wandering through the forest, it will follow him for days and weeks, waiting round the village he has entered until it lose all hope of his reappearance. This is the native story, and though true in the main point, I

cannot believe it altogether. No carnivorous animal will wander beyond its own district, as we had occasion to note in the Straits, unless it intend to emigrate. But that a puma will follow a trail as far as its "beat" extends is true; one constantly notes, under the fresh marks of this animal's passage, the half-effaced footprints of a man. Nor do I think this is entirely in hope of prey. A puma must know perfectly well the age of a trail, and his instinct would scarcely lead him to follow one four or five days old. And yet he does so. It is a very curious question.

But there is nothing in Nature, as I think, so fearful as this stealthy man-tracking of the puma. Fancy, as I can well, the deep dim forest with its awful murmurs and still reverberations. Fancy the scared face of the traveller, half conscious of the dread pursuit, yet trying to deceive himself. He turns at length in desperate resolution, following his own trail; and as he turns there is a rustle in the undergrowth, and his last hope is gone in marking a broad round footprint that has effaced his own. Frantically he goes on, machete in hand; at

every open space casting a fearful eye behind into that twisted thicket, from which no sound comes, nor any threat, but only a waving of the leaves. His white lips move in an agony of prayer. He glances upwards with despairing terror as the slender rays fall more and more obliquely through the tree tops. And ever as he passes the silent wave of leaves goes after him, and through the glades a long red monster slinks and crouches along his trail, with head down pressed, and great green eyes aflame with eagerness. Swiftly, mistily, night comes down; the maddened traveller walks on and on, falling, wounded, half-dead with weariness, and sinks at length under some time-hoary tree. Then the great eyes flash nearer and nearer, until they glare hungrily into his face. And if he be awake they disappear again with a long rustle of the brushwood; but if he be asleep they burn and blaze over him. And then a sharp sudden cry is heard, a savage growl, a momentary struggle; and then the undergrowth cracks and sways as the beast drags slowly through.

To resume the account of our journey down the Serebpiqui. After shooting several small

rapids lying at the foot of the great fall, we paddled merrily over the sunlit water until midday. Then we approached the second danger, and here the boatmen jumped overboard, except the steersman. Certainly at the time of our passing this was a more dangerous channel even than the first. I could give no description of its wild vehemence, and the natives admitted they had never before seen it in such a state. Safely standing on the bank, we watched the struggles of our men to launch the canoe into the right channel: when this aim was accomplished they forced their way inch by inch to join us. The sight of their helplessness at the head of the rapid suggested to us the thought—how would it fare with one upset in the midst thereof? However we paddled on safely and merrily, shooting the rapids, flashing through the deeps, leaping overboard in the more dangerous shallows; and towards evening we entered the broad San Juan river, and our Serebpiqui journey was over.

The San Juan looked miserably rough and dirty after the bright reaches we had lately passed; the drooping vegetation on its banks

seemed dull and colourless. But we paddled cheerily onwards, keeping a sharp look-out for snags and dozing alligators. "Snags" are the curse of river travelling. In the great floods which occur periodically in half-cultivated countries, a tree is torn from the river bank and carried down stream. In the first shallow it sticks fast, and the water rushing over snaps off the smaller branches, leaving sharp "snags" below the surface. Merrily the canoe is skimming along, driven by current and paddle; a sudden shock and swirl is felt, canoe and boatmen are dashed over, and lucky are the latter if some of them are not impaled upon the "snag." A thousand-ton ship may be, and has been, sunk by one of these wooden rocks. In the midst of a bad rapid on the Serebpiqui I remember we swung over a snag which the look-out had not seen. We were saved from the point by about half an inch; a quarter of an inch of greater height would have overturned us, and then we had slept in a noble winding-sheet. As it was, the shock was just sufficient to satisfy the curious as to the expression of a man's face when he sees death "by visitation of God."

After a couple of hours' muddy paddling over the rough San Juan, we reached Mr. Wolfe's plantation, of which I spoke in the second chapter. The hospitable owner was at Greytown, but Mrs. Wolfe and her daughter received us with a kindly welcome; and of no place on earth have we a more grateful memory than of their pretty dwelling embowered in orange-trees. For the first time since leaving San José we slept under a roof, protected from the murderous mosquitoes by orthodox curtains. In the morning I was roused early by the shouts and songs of our boatmen. Taking my gun, I strolled round the house, and was fortunate enough to kill a "tuboba" at a very critical moment.

The snakes of Central America are innumerable, but those most frequently met with are the boba, black snake, tuboba, rattlesnake, and corale. The two first are harmless, but the others are very dangerous. The boba, or chicken-snake, I have already mentioned several times; I killed a fine specimen on Ometepec. This species rarely attains a greater length than twelve feet, it is yellowish-brown in colour, darker towards the head and tail.

The mouth is very large in proportion to the body.

The implacable enmity between the black snake and the rattlesnake is one of the most curious facts in natural history. The former has a long thin body, jet black on the upper surface, and fading in rays towards the belly. Whenever he catches sight of his enemy he rushes to the attack, even though both be in captivity. The rattlesnake rarely awaits him, but slinks off with his utmost speed. The pursuer however is much the more active of the two, and unless some deep hole be near, never fails to overtake the foe. And then begins a curious combat which has often been witnessed. It is said that the rattlesnake makes no attempt to use his fangs, probably from a knowledge that they would be useless, but strives to meet the enemy with his own natural arms—the hug and strain. But unless the sizes be very disproportioned, the black constrictor is of course victorious, crushing his enemy's life out by successive contractions.* When the rattler is dead,

* Some writers in describing this combat have asserted that the constrictor "whips" with his tail and thus stupefies the rattler. As

or at least motionless, the black snake gives one final hug, and then stretches himself out head to head, and swallows the vanquished. For this purpose he does not moisten the prey and gloat over it, according to his usual practice, but swallows it whole, sometimes before it is quite dead. He appears to care nothing for the poison. The black snake is harmless to man, and very rarely is he injured.*

The tuboba is one of the largest of venomous serpents, and also one of the most graceful. His colour is a delicate mottling of black and brown and ashy grey; there is a satiny gloss about his body, very beautiful to see. The largest we killed was in throwing down a wood-pile on the San Juan, a work rarely carried through without

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I never saw the scene myself, I speak with deference, but surely the black snake could have no purchase if his tail were loose. I have seen constrictors seize their victims, and in every case, except where the animal was very small, the tail was twisted round a branch or a stump, to gain leverage for the hug. In a rattlesnake fight, I believe the black snake twists his tail round the body of his antagonist and "bears" upon it.

* The black snake of America is to be distinguished from that of the East. There is a certain "chop-chop" to be heard all through the jungle at sunset in the latter hemisphere, which the Malays unanimously attribute to the "black snake:" with what truth I cannot say.

rousing one or more of these snakes, which are terribly common everywhere. He was between eight and nine feet long, but I have not the exact measurement; that I shot in Mr. Wolfe's yard was six feet two inches. The tuboba has a wide mouth, provided with four fangs, two longer in front, and the shorter behind. In a specimen comparatively small I measured the fangs; the longest pair were an inch in length, and the shorter three-quarters of an inch. The poison is very deadly, but not so quick in its action as that of the corale and the colebra de sangre.

Of the rattlesnake of Nicaragua it is not necessary to speak. He differs in no important respect from the rattlesnake of the States, except that the natives sometimes draw his fangs and tame him, when he acts as a house-dog, rattling loudly at the approach of a stranger. We saw one in a glass-case at San José, which had not moved nor eaten for seven months; he glanced up on being disturbed, but that was the only sign he would give of life.

The beautiful corale is found in both hemispheres, and in both shows great irregularity of colour. He is not large in size, rarely reaching

a length greater than three feet; his body becomes thick and stumpy on gaining age. The venom of this snake seems to be of different power according to locality: we heard a much more hopeless account of him in the plains than on the table-land of Chontales. Rings of three colours surround his body, black and white and another. Mr. Byam says that he never met with two specimens that agreed in the tint of their third ring; but, so far as I have noticed, it is generally a shade of crimson more or less intense. I have seen a case in which it was of brightest gold, and another of orange, but most usually it is scarlet or crimson. The time of year and age and state of health would probably make great changes in a colour so brilliant. The order of the rings is also irregular, but in general the black is highest, then the red, and the white last. A bite of the corale kills in half an hour, the blood becoming solid.

Of the fearful "colebra de sangre" I have already spoken. It is, luckily, as rare as it is dangerous. In length this snake is seldom more than eighteen inches, and its colour is an uniform crimson. The whole blood of a person bitten

by the sangre exudes through the pores in a deathly sweat. The end comes in about twenty minutes.

The other snakes of Nicaragua are endless in catalogue, but these are most noticeable. The python reaches a great size in the swampy plains of the Mosquito shore; but I never met with a specimen, nor is it common up the country. There are many nameless snakes more or less brilliant which one sees in every walk or ride; but in these thick forests reptiles are difficult to catch, unless they be venomous, in which case they are more dignified in their flight.

The subject of snakes naturally leads one to that of other reptiles. The true eatable iguana is a brown and red monster, crested upon the head and down the back, with a long tail gradually rounding towards the tip. But there is another lizard, which I strongly suspect to be the male of the brown iguana, almost as common. This one is bright green in colour, harder and tougher than the larger species, if distinct species it be. Many people will assert that the latter is poisonous; but I found that the lower classes eat both indiscriminately, and so did we, without any ill result.

The brown iguana varies in length from three to six feet, the green from three to four. Either reptile will give a severe bite to any one so foolish as to put his hand near their mouths, but they are quite incapable of wanton attack. Certainly, of all the dishes man's boldness has devised, the iguana is the most venturesome. His huge and crested head, hideous expression, and pinched toughness of appearance, seem rather to point him out as an animal to be eternally avoided; but in this, as in other cases, the first step only is difficult. Without participating in the raptures of some travellers, I can conscientiously say that the iguana is very good eating, and that there is more flesh on his loosely-hung body than would be expected.*

The natives catch them with a hook and line, like fish, using a bit of banana as bait; but the main food of the iguana is beetles, as I observed. They sit upon trees in great flocks; I do not mean to say gregariously, because they are fre-

* The largest iguana we measured was six feet five inches in length; but Mr. Jebb shot a reddish monster on the road to Masaya, which was certainly eight feet long. I have heard of them eight feet three inches, but these dimensions must be very rare. M. Frœbel says he saw one as big as a boy of ten years old.

quently found alone, but in great numbers of individuals. The neighbourhood of water has a special attraction for them, and when struck with a bullet, whether killed or only wounded, they drop like pellets into the pool beneath, where, if dead, they straightway sink, or, if still alive, swim to shore under the surface. The fall of one does not in the least warn his fellows, and they may be picked off to the very last. It is better, however, that two hunters be in company, for the reptiles slip quietly from side to side of their bough, leaving in view two claws alone, a long drooping tail, and a glassy eye. Care must be taken in handling the wounded, as they snap sharply, and their back-turned teeth make a painful and sometimes dangerous sore.

The smaller lizards of Nicaragua are not, as a rule, bright in colour, but their name is legion. There are tree lizards, and ground lizards, and sand lizards; the latter frequenting the clumps of sand-apple on the lake shore. The air alone is free from their harmless intrusion, for I never met with a flying species. That beautiful little fellow, which shines like emerald upon the tree trunks in the East and West Indies, is also ab-

sent. But there are a few very gay and sparkling; among them I noticed one with scales of dull orange and crimson mottlings.

We only heard of two venomous species, of which I have already spoken in the first chapter. The one we killed, the other was well authenticated to us. Both are dull and sombre in colour.

About ten o'clock in the morning we left Mr. Wolfe's hospitable plantation, with a memory of ready kindness never to be effaced from our minds. The broad San Juan was muddy and broken; the long drought had fairly exhausted it. Our boatmen were here ignorant of the deep channels, and we walked mile after mile in the river-bed, its water not being deep enough to float our canoe. What chance of a canal exists in such a worn-out stream as this? The whole river, if not the southern end of the lake itself, is surely and swiftly silting up. Turtles' and alligators' nests abounded on the long sandspits; and we passed the time in digging out their eggs while the canoe was lifted and pushed over the shallows. Iguanas' nests were most frequent. These reptiles lay twenty or thirty small eggs in the sand, smooth-

ing the surface over them, like turtles. The natives eat them with great relish; but they are rather insipid compared with those of the turtle, which they resemble except in size and shape. The yelk is covered with a thin white skin, slightly rough, but quite soft. In size they vary from the length of a hedge-sparrow's egg to that of a throstle. The turtle's eggs are quite round. Once on a time I was persuaded to taste the great broad egg of an alligator, which the natives also eat whenever they can find a nest. It was coarse and strong. The shell is thick, white, and very hard.

About twenty miles from Greytown we re-embarked, and paddled swiftly seawards. The "manatee" rose and sank on every side, and swift, silent waves told of their course beneath the surface. Then the mosquitoes came out in such numbers as left no doubt of our vicinity. At sunset we entered the long flat wilderness of purple weed surrounding Greytown Harbour; and just as dark settled down on the river, the town lights sparkled before us, and we pulled to shore opposite the Union Hotel.

Here these travels end. We passed a few days at Greytown, shooting and wandering about the jungle, until the English mail arrived. The bar was even more dangerous than at the time of our arrival; for a very few months make a great change in a harbour so utterly worn out. While we were up the country, Greytown bar absolutely closed the river-mouth, and the people had to open it with spades. Three days our steamer lay off the town before the passengers could be landed; and it was expected that the freight would be carried back to Aspinwall; but at length the weather moderated, and a considerable number of English miners were safely passed over the bar. Great fun they were to the shrewd Yankees of the town, and numberless mystifications were passed on the good-natured fellows. Captain P——, "doing the polite" to a big Irishman, led him to the Transit wharf, which lies very low, scarcely above the water level. "Ye must have mighty big floods here, sirr," said the Irishman. "Yes, sir, that's just what we have." "Don't ye never have the houses washed down, sirr?" "Now I'll tell *you*. You saw them big anchors down by the wharf?"

"Sure did I." "Well, sir, when we see a flood coming down, we anchor the houses to them flukes, and we ride it out pretty constant." "Jasus!"

At length we entered the Carib canoes, to be conveyed on board. On reaching the bar they landed us upon a long sandspit, and poled themselves through the channel, taking us up on the other side. The water was barely two feet deep. To such a condition is reduced Greytown Harbour, which was described, twenty years ago, as one of the finest in the world. Man has done it much injury; but he has only hastened the sure work of nature. In five years more the town will stand on the bank of a broad lagoon, landlocked except in one small channel, through which the San Juan will flow, to carry on the same process upon the other side. Thus it is with all the rivers on the Atlantic seaboard. The land gains steadily upon the ocean. First is a broad river-mouth; then a low bar which protects the harbour; then a surf dangerous to cross; and, finally, the sand stretches right across the mouth, and changes the harbour into a lagoon. Already there is

talk of discontinuing the mail-service from England. Although the steamer waits six days off the town, passengers have been carried back to Aspinwall, owing to the impossibilty of crossing the bar. With freight this has happened several times. Such accidents must now become more and more frequent every month. In fact, as the people themselves say, "Greytown is played out!"

THE END.

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